

## De Profundis

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## De Profundis

by [loglady1980](#)

### Summary

“Promises can be broken, George. Vows can be broken. Look at you, for example,” Dream says, bringing his lips to George’s ear. “You break your vows so I can break you.”

### Notes

just a quick reminder that niki's been deleted and i've included an original character as will's love interest (nathalie) because i don't want to cross any cc boundaries <3

# Mutation

## Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for [notes](#)

A draft blows through the dark halls of the abbey, chilling George's bones. He shakes slightly as he sits slumped over in a wooden pew, watching Will pace, explaining the coronation ceremony for what seems like the billionth time. George inspects his nails, dried blood in his cuticles making him cringe. As a child, his mother would slap the back of his hand and spill strong wine over his fingers to clean the wounds, kissing his abused fingers when the ordeal was over.

George remembers her long, dark hair laced with gold twine. He closes his eyes—just for a moment—trying to envision her waking him and James, sunlight streaming through the large window in their shared playroom, creating a halo around his mother's pale face. George wakes up alone now, no mother to wipe the sleep from his eyes, no brother to play knights with as breakfast is prepared.

The archbishop stands at attention near the altar, his furrowed, wrinkled brow framing cloudy eyes that make George, at the age of twenty-three, squirm like a toddler at Christmas mass. George looks away, the thinly-veiled distaste of the archbishop all too familiar.

George sees the same tired, yet scornful look in the eyes of the citizens of Saudade as he walks through the market every Sunday morning. The subjects bow—*my subjects*, George reminds himself. *These are my subjects now*. George knows, though. He knows the whispers that plague the taverns he spent his teenage years frequenting. George knows what his loyal subjects say when wooden doors are bolted shut, oil lanterns extinguished, and children are put to bed.

*“Why did we have to get stuck with the fucking spare?”*

George saw the same look in his father's eyes as the elder lay with protruding bones and decaying teeth; his dilapidated form creating a twisted contrast with the silk sheets and gold trimmings of his kingly robes. King Henry the Great, first of his name, conqueror of lands, lay stripped of all dignity, yet his pride proved intact enough to cast one last withering glare at his son, the crown prince of Saudade.

“See you in hell, *George*,” he spat out, and with that, King Henry was dead. A single tear tracked down George's otherwise emotionless face, a final reminder of the prince's inadequacy ringing in the air.

Sir William Gould, private secretary to the king, announced Henry's death the following afternoon at a meeting of the crown's advisory board, as George slumped over, inspecting the cracked cobblestone floor. A round table of men with full beards and greying locks stared at their new king, almost as if they expected him to suddenly transform into the great man his father once was. No matter how hard they squinted, the bearded men saw George, the boy with a whorish, mischievous reputation who formerly walked the streets of Saudade, bedding every woman and challenging every man.

The boy who was never meant to be king.

Shadows danced on the dark oak walls as George tuned out the discussions of mourning policy, church proceedings, and foreign relations. He studied his advisers; he studied Will; he studied the chandelier his mother begged his father to commission from a local woodworker, hanging

precariouly as if it would fall at the slightest wind. George felt the dried tear tracks on his cheeks, he felt the itchy material of his pants, he felt the drafty air that permeated every dark corner of the castle, he felt the fucking weight, the weight of his father and his brother and his mother pounding into his heart, their tormented souls pressing their feet onto his chest and never letting up. He felt the weight of being the last living descendant of House Windsor. He felt the weight of forty thousand starving people suddenly at his mercy, not his father's. George felt everything, and yet, his face remained as placid as ever.

He cleared his throat.

The advisers continued, paying no mind to George's discomfort. The meeting was heated now, with some men banging their fists on the table so as to be heard, some men arguing in raised whispers, conveniently excluding the new king. Will shifted, noticing George fidgeting, the king's normally childlike, innocent features furrowed into a grimace.

George stood, and the room fell silent, advisers bowing their heads.

"Thank you all for your input. Further proceedings can be coordinated through the Archbishop and Sir Gould. You can go," George declared, his voice finding confidence he thought he'd left in the taverns of his youth.

He stumbled off the throne, stalking past the table of gaping advisers, towards the great door that separated the throne room from the rest of the castle.

"Your Highness," one of the advisers called, "your coronation will be in three months. Preparations will start after the period of court mourning."

"Alright," George huffed. "Please direct any further issues to "Wil- Sir Gould," he added with a curt nod.

"Your Highness," an adviser called again, "Long live King George the Fifth."

"Long live King George the Fifth," echoed the rest, even Will, as he locked eyes with the new king, his *friend*.

"Long live King George the Fifth," George murmured, and he wished they meant it.

—

George sprints out of the Abbey to catch up with Will, who left in a huff after another dispute over minutiae with the Archbishop.

"Alright, your highness?" Will says with a grin.

"Alright, Sir Gould?" George counters, his face breaking into a smile.

They walk in silence down the cobblestone path back to the castle, George's hood up to prevent any unwanted attention. George thought back to his childhood, spending time climbing the thick vines outside the castle with Will, skipping lessons to fling themselves off trees into the river that surrounded Saudade. George thought of his teenage years, when he and Will stumbled into taverns, drinking themselves into a stupor and challenging local merchants to darts. Will grew into his lanky body and tamed his curls, bedding every woman within a ten-mile radius of the castle. George followed suit, beginning to dress "common", as his father put it, donning loose white shirts and leather pants, blending into the masses. He fucked and he fought and he drank. They were young, reckless, and free—George and Will, Will and George.

“George, listen-” Will starts, his eyes studying the land before them. George’s land. “The advisers were mentioning your guard. Captain Jameson is getting rather old, and you need someone to lead, someone young-”

“Alright, so find someone,” George interjects, studying his nails, “isn’t that your job, *private secretary*?” George grins at Will, who rolls his eyes.

“We have a few options, but you should make a decision. I have my favorite, as do the advisers, and the final decision comes down to a vote among them. You can veto their decision, though, if you really must.”

“That would put them in a good mood, wouldn’t it?” George chuckles, “bastards, the whole lot of them. They can’t wait until I slip up and the citizens kick me out... Can’t wait to make a fool of baby prince Georgie.” He smiles ruefully at Will, who blinks and runs his hands through his curls.

“I know, George, but you have to cooperate. I know you didn’t want this. Just let me finish.”

George nods, noticing the dark crescents that have become a permanent fixture under Will’s eyes, the tired expression that dominates Will’s aristocratic features more prominent in the dying sunlight.

“There’s David Throughborn, of Aberdeen,” Will starts. “He’s good. Strong. Young, but very experienced. One of the advisers saw him kill twenty armed men with nothing but a dagger in the Battle of Hesse.”

“Holy fuck.”

“Yeah, it was fucking insane,” Will breathes, “he’s a legend. But I have to caution you, he’s a little... Boring.”

"Boring?"

"He's a real rule follower. Which is good, but not when it comes to you. You need to show strength, George. You need to prove to people that you aren't your father, but you aren't some sissy."

“Who else?” George asks, kicking rocks down the path. “Who makes me look like a fucking *emperor*?”

“Dream,” Will mutters.

“Sorry, who?”

“Dream.” He states plainly. They reach the main gate of the castle just as the last slivers of light slip away. George nods to the guards and steps through, Will trailing behind him. George shrugs off his furs and stalks into the great hall, calling servants to light candles and serve dinner. The candlelight creates strange shadows and the fireplace crackles as George and Will dig into their food. George chews once, gulps down a sip of wine, and glances at Will.

“Dream,” George murmurs, “strange name, isn’t it? Who is he?”

Will looks up to the ceiling, almost as if to request divine intervention, and shuts his eyes. “Dream is my favorite. Not the advisers. He’s controversial, hotheaded, and kind of fucking insane. He’s the son of a great king in Sweden. They exiled him.”

“Exiled?”

“Exiled,” Will confirms, his mouth settling into a grimace, “apparently he had a tendency to... I don’t know. All I heard is they used to find him skinning baby animals. Alive. He’d volunteer to torture prisoners, and he liked it. When the man his sister was betrothed to ran away with another woman, Dream killed him. And the mistress, for good measure. He’s ruthless. He gets off on it, I think. Which is why he’s better than any other knight they drag in from god-knows-where. You need someone strong. You need someone who can show the world you mean business. You have the best because you are the best.” Will’s voice grows hushed and George feels a chill run down his spine. It’s his show now, not his father’s. It’s his fucking kingdom. His choice.

“What’s his real name?” George finally breaks the silence, resuming his dinner.

“Dunno.”

“Send for him.”

“At once, your highness.”

Will leaves with a wink, dinner discarded, as George calls for more wine.

## Chapter End Notes

hope you guys are liking it so far! it's my first time writing fic so I'm a bit nervous to post this. thanks for reading!

i may change the rating to explicit as i add more chapters, but i'm not exactly sure yet. i also might add some more characters from the SMP!

here's the spotify playlist:

<https://open.spotify.com/playlist/34nRL5AY2mcoHpG1PDhdoA?si=udrmAV4bT-OjInrmz0MkyA>

love from the loglady <3

# Hallelujah Junction

## Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for [notes](#)

George wakes to the gentle vibrations of tolling bells, punctuated by a frantic banging on his door.

“Fuck, come inside,” he says groggily.

“George! Coronation today! Arise, sweet king!” Will booms, chuckling lightly.

“Fuck off,” George mutters, pulling the covers over his head, eyes fluttering shut.

Charles the Sixth of Saudade and Elytron died when George was twelve and James fourteen. The princes had little memory of their late grandfather, gold trinkets on their nightstands the only reminder of the great ruler. George remembers his father calling James into the castle library a day after the funeral, locking the door behind him—locking George out.

James emerged an hour later, solemn expression clouding his childlike features. George scampered up to his brother, asking “what happened, Jamie?”, asking to be let into the secret meeting of kings. James exhaled and spoke, almost as if reciting a mantra: “Father’s going to be king now. Then I will be king. Everything will change, George.”

For once, George wished his brother was wrong.

King Henry’s coronation was a grand affair, a mere two weeks after the death of his father. George and James were present when their father tried the crown- *his crown* for the first time. King Henry wobbled as he paced back and forth, practicing the walk from the altar with the heavy jewels adorning his head. After what seemed like the billionth time, George stood from the pew he was perched on, eyes wide and childlike, and asked his father to try the crown.

“Oh, alright, Georgie. Just once then,” his father grinned.

“Me too!” shouted James, “It’s going to be mine someday.”

The boys raced down the abbey to their father. James tried the crown on first, brim slipping over his eyes. The boys laughed, and King Henry placed the crown firmly on George’s head. George looked at himself in the reflection of his father’s sword. He blinked once and yanked the heavy crown off, setting it down at his father’s feet.

“Heir and a spare,” the Archbishop smiled, “he will grow to be a strong ruler,” he said, motioning to James. “And Prince George, whatever shall we do with you?” he chuckled jokingly, but George felt it in his twelve-year-old heart. Felt his inadequacy. Felt like an *outsider*.

“This is yours, father,” George said solemnly. The young prince turned, walking down the long abbey halls towards his mother, tears rapidly pooling in his eyes.

“Mum, it’s not fair,” he said, voice shaking as he neared Queen Anastasia.

“Being the spare isn’t bad, Georgie,” she whispered. “Be thankful you don’t have to parade around with that jeweled monstrosity on your head,” she said with a wink. “We must learn to take the backseat, let our loved ones shine. You and I support from the wings. It doesn’t mean we are any less important.”

“Will James still play knights with me?”

“Honestly, George,” she huffed lightly, “your brother’s not going to be king for a long time. He’s still the same James.”

George smiled as his mother dragged her dainty fingers across his cheek, wiping away the fat tears that escaped without his knowing.

“Let’s go pick apples?”

“Alright, mum.”

Days later, as the Archbishop anointed King Henry’s chest with holy oil, George watched breathlessly as his mother knelt, his father’s most important subject surrendering herself to her husband. Surrendering herself to the crown. George wondered who would be the first to kneel in front of James, who *his* most important subject would be.

The awestruck look in the older boy’s eyes told George he wondered the same.

George searched for Will, scanning the crowd for where his friend sat within the crowded pews. As the boys locked eyes, grinning, the Archbishop placed the heavy crown atop King Henry’s head, then a second crown was lowered onto Queen Anastasia’s dark, braided locks. He felt a pressure growing in his chest as the quiet room seemed to swell, the sun rays creating a halo around the new King and Queen, dust particles glowing and swirling in the air.

George turned to look back at his father. King Henry tilted his head, barely enough to notice, and whispered “alright, Anna?”

The Queen smiled and stood with her husband, hands tangled together behind their backs, King Henry’s knuckles nearly white. James stood, then George, as the Archbishop turned to face the crowd.

“Long live King Henry!”

“Long live King Henry!” the guests echoed, filling the abbey with their cheers.

George’s lips moved, mouthing the chant, but no sound came out.

His father took a deep breath, large hands still clutching his wife’s dainty ones, stepped forward, and began to greet his subjects.

James’ private tutorials began soon after, and George longed for his brother as he galavanted with Will on the outskirts of the castle grounds. The young prince yearned for the connection they once had, but understood the James he knew died with their grandfather. No more playing knights, no more flinging potatoes across the table at dinner, no more running into the woods, away from nannies and chambermaids.

James needed to set a good example, learn how to be a ruler as great as his father and grandfather. George was a liability, a mere child watching from the wings. The young prince returned to the castle every day with mud splattered on his arms and face, grinning like a Cheshire cat, while James sat idly next to the fireplace, reading thick books about policy and governing.

And so, the princes of Saudade grew apart, drifting away like the paper boats they released in rivers surrounding their city.

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George's introspection is rudely interrupted by Will yanking the silk sheets off, exposing George's naked chest to the cold morning air. Goosebumps erupt across George's flesh as he begins hurling a string of distasteful words at his friend.

"Let's go, *King* George."

George throws a shirt on, dismissing servants serving breakfast. He saunters after Will to his dressing room, where his coronation robes are laid out, pressed to perfection.

"This is it, then?" he breathes.

"This is where I leave you," Will nods.

"I'll be seeing you, Sir Gould."

"Likewise, your highness," Will nods, the cheerful tone and mischievous grin painfully absent.

Servants dress George, covering him in silks, furs, and jewels. He walks in a procession of advisers, servants, knights, and distant relatives, as the children of chambermaids trail behind, aching for a glimpse of the excessive finery. George enters his carriage with a knight stationed for protection, and his mind drifts to Dream. *When will I meet him?*

Will greets him at the abbey with a sour mood, having, once again, entered an unfortunate argument with the Archbishop.

"You know what to do, George."

"Do I?"

Will takes his place behind the altar.

George walks down the aisle, and a hush falls over the crowd filling the rows upon rows of pews. He remembers his family, his blood—Henry, James, Anastasia, Charles, all gone. He remembers the meeting of kings, remembers his mother's fingers against his cheek, wiping away fat tears. George remembers his father's set jaw, his parents clutching each others' hands. His red furs itch, the jewels poke his skin, the brand new boots pinch his feet. Pressure blooms in George's chest.

George sneaks a glance at the stained glass windows, smiling slightly at the mermaid and her sailor, his favorite as a child.

He reaches the altar, kneeling before the Archbishop on the hard cobblestone floor. George's robe is discarded, handed to Will. The knights stand at attention around the altar, looking almost inhuman. George's eyes scan the crowd, royals from far and wide to see the baby prince become a king; advisers ready to lead; army men ready to follow.

George loosens the ties on his white shirt, exposing the upper half of his pale chest to the Archbishop. *Oil, spurs, sword, orb, ring, crown*, George repeats in his head. The order of the coronation's rituals. A mantra, a reminder.

As the holy oil drips down George's chest, he raises his eyes to the Archbishop, acknowledging him with a slight nod. He sees a flash in his peripheral vision, and a man in a white mask seems to materialize next to Will, towering over the rest of the abbey's occupants. George sits on the throne, bowing his head to the Archbishop, robes fastened securely.



The spurs are thrust into his hand. George's eyes flick up again, watching the man in the mask crack his knuckles, strong fingers flaming red.

Next, the sword. George grips it tightly, causing his fingers to ache. The man shifts.

The orb is set in George's outstretched hand, gold cross proudly upright. The man whispers to Will.

The emerald-encrusted ring is slid onto George's finger. The man resumes his proper stance.

The Archbishop grasps the crown.

"We kneel before the king in the presence of God," the Archbishop booms.

George shifts.

The masked man's knee hits the floor, sword scraping cobblestone, just before everyone begins to kneel.

George remembers the morning's conversation with Will.

"You don't have a spouse, George!" Will said, laughing raucously, "If the monarch doesn't have a spouse, we all kneel at the same time."

"Oh," George replied, "that makes sense."

The crown is placed firmly on George's head.

"Do your brother proud," the Archbishop utters, his cloudy eyes suddenly a clear blue. "Do Anna-your mother proud."

George swallows, rising from his throne.

Wish glassy eyes, the Archbishop booms, "Long live King George!"

"Long live King George!"

The man's mouth moves under the mask as cheers die out.

King George steps forward, ready to greet his subjects, hyper-aware of the masked man now looming over his shoulder.

The abbey doors shudder closed as the last guest exits, another coronation come and gone.

## Chapter End Notes

if you've made it this far, thanks for reading! hope you enjoyed my little dream reveal.

<https://open.spotify.com/playlist/34nRL5AY2mcoHpG1PDhdoA>

here's a playlist for the vibes i'm going for in this story. it isn't in any particular order (yet). the playlist will start making more sense as i post more chapters.

keep the kudos and comments coming! i love hearing what everyone thinks!

also, can we just talk about dream yelling on stream today. whew. butterflies. it's good to know i've been portraying him accurately in the upcoming chapters ;)

if you would like me to tw something, i'd be happy to include it in the tags or notes at the beginning of the chapter. i'll be including trigger warnings for violence/blood/any sexual content, but if i miss something please let me know <3

love from the loglady :)

# Shower

## Chapter Summary

TW for blood in this chapter!

## Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for [notes](#)

Three days after the coronation, Will announces the advisers have requested an audience with the new captain of the guard. George dresses quickly, Will lazily draped over an armchair behind him, reading from a parchment. As servants button his shirt, George turns to his secretary.

“What’s he been up to?” George asks, in a feeble attempt to quell the anxiety festering in the pit of his stomach.

“He’s a glorified bounty hunter, as far as I know. I’ve spoken to him a bit. Seems like he goes wherever the wind takes him, wherever there’s work. He’s comfortable, of course, because of his father’s money, but he can’t go back to Sweden.”

“Weird. You’d think he would have just married into some lesser aristocratic family and lived his life out quietly.”

“He’s a fucking sadist,” Will laughs, “how long before he’d be torturing his farmhands?”

George lets out a weak chuckle.

They walk to the throne room together, Will falling behind George as the grand doors open. Advisers rise from their seats as George ambles towards the throne.

Five minutes later, guards heave the doors open again, and George sees him. The man who knelt first.

The masked man stalks up to the throne. He’s tall, almost oppressively so, towering over the rest of the knights, advisers, even Will, who George considers a giant. Kneeling before his king for the second time in a week, the knight’s armored knee hits the floor with a jarring *clang*. George notes the mood of the throne room shift when the man walks in—he notices how Will shifts uncomfortably from his spot next to the gilded throne. The guards posted at the sides of the sprawling room eye each other uncomfortably, and advisers begin to murmur with worry. The masked man casts a spell over the room with nothing more than his imposing presence, and George can’t figure out if he’s terrified or intrigued.

There’s no sound other than torches crackling until George clears his throat. Will glances at the king and speaks.

“State your business, knight.”

“Your majesty, Sir Gould. My name is Dream of Hallstad, son of King Dominic of the Swedes,

Ruler of the Highlands. I have been summoned to serve as the captain of your guard.” Dream sounds confident, almost cocky. His voice isn’t loud, but it reverberates around the throne room, bouncing off the stained glass windows and filling George with discomfort.

The advisers’ muttering grows louder, an anxious din filling the cold air.

Dream’s voice hits George like a thunderstorm—swirls around his head and rings in his ears long after he finishes speaking. Darkness follows him—George swears he feels the torches flicker and temperature drop when Dream speaks. Allowing his eyes to wander over the knight, George notes his aristocratic posture, examining the way Dream’s sandy blonde hair curls at his neck, the way his broad shoulders shift under the weight of his armor. A gilded sword rests at the knight’s belt, glowing purple in the dim orange light of the throne room, his massive hands encircling the hilt.

George’s eyes trace the veins that curve around the back of Dream’s hand. Scabbed knuckles and jagged scars glare back at the king, almost daring him to continue his examination.

The king addresses his knight, trying to mask the quiver in his voice. “My advisers have questions on the... efficacy of your methods. You must quell their concerns before I formally bestow knighthood upon you.”

“And you, your majesty? Do *you* have any questions for me?” Dream angles his head up, still kneeling before the king. His words feel like a taunt, a challenge. White ceramic masks Dream’s features, but George watches the bitten red lips curl into a sneer.

George’s heart plunges into his stomach, Dream’s cocky voice causing anger to bubble in his chest. “No,” the king’s voice comes out clearly, despite the hairs standing up on the back of his neck. “I am confident in your abilities to lead. I only ask that you comply with my advisers.”

The advisers commence their inquiry, methodically reading out questions, mainly about the terms of Dream’s exile, his plans for law enforcement, his willingness to protect the king. George’s attention is trained onto the knight kneeling before him, who answers each question with a low tone and clipped words.

“And how will we be certain your history of rash violence and insubordination will not pose an issue?” George’s oldest adviser, Sir Philips, croaks out. “How are we to be assured of your allegiance to the king?”

Dream cocks his head, and grips the sword until his marred knuckles turn white. George swallows.

“I was exiled for deeds I wish I could scour from this earth. I committed wrongdoings I will repent for. I regret my rash behavior, I regret my *insubordination*. I regret disappointing my father. But I will not stand before you and pretend I am a changed man. My ruthlessness, my rumored *bloodthirst*, my lack of compassion—I’ve harnessed it. I’ve become stronger because of it. Your enemies, your dissenters, they’ll fucking witness what you bastards are murmuring about. If they live—and I promise you, they won’t—they’ll tell *everybody* the stories are true. They’ll tell everyone that King George has a *monster* running his army, that *Lucifer himself* guards his bedchamber at night. Your pansy-ass king won’t look like a little boy on a big throne when I’m in charge. People won’t scoff at Saudade, they’ll shiver at the thought of the army’s attack. I’m fucking worth it. Don’t pretend like you’re all high and mighty, above the bloodlust. I hear the whispers. I’m here for a reason. *I know you need me.*”

The room falls silent.

George stands, feeling a surge of blood rushing in his ears. Everyone jumps to their feet, except

Dream, whose lips have, once again, twisted into that cocky smile.

“I think we all agree that your *methods*, while controversial, are exactly what Saudade needs. I am prepared to believe your, ah, *childish outbursts* are a thing of the past,” George says coldly.

“However, I’d caution you to watch that tongue of yours. This ‘pansy-ass’ king is fully prepared to ship in another bloodthirsty Viking from god-knows-where. One more step out of line, one more little *performance*, and I’ll have your head on a spike outside the abbey. I’ll feed your body to my dogs. Trust me, you’ll come to understand that the townspeople enjoy a good neck-snapping just as much as the next psychopathic Swede. Do your fucking job, and keep your ass in line.” George’s voice is an angry whisper, his stomach churning with rage. The advisers are glued to the floor, their mouths open in varying stages of shock. Will rubs at his temples almost as if trying to wake up from a nightmare.

George walks forward, looking down at the man before him, and shoves the point of his sword under the knight’s chin, hard enough to draw blood. For an agonizing minute, they stay frozen, with nothing but the rustling of parchment and crackling torches to break the tenuous silence. Dream turns his head in a languid motion, subtle enough for only George to see, allowing the blade to slice into the knight’s tanned skin, a singular drop of blood trickling down his neck.

Carefully, Dream draws his head back, letting the blade cut him once again. Cocky grin wiped from his lips, the knight clenches his jaw, once, twice, three times, reveling in the pain.

“Get to work,” the king breathes, “Nicholas is second in command. He’ll be reporting your every move to me. Fuck something up and I’ll kill you with my own two hands. That’s a promise.”

“Yes, your majesty. I live to serve,” Dream murmurs, sending clouds to wrap around the fury in George’s mind. Nodding to Nicholas, George lowers his sword. He smirks, feeling a strange sense of pride at the King finally defending himself, and tilts his head in acknowledgment.

George knights Dream, placing his sword on the taller man’s shoulders as an adviser recites his duties.

“Swear to protect your King. Swear to answer only to your King. Swear to serve blindly, swear to worship your King, and surrender yourself to him. Do you swear, in the eyes of God, to serve your duty, to stop at nothing to protect?”

“Yes,” Dream says, the hardness in his voice creeping back in.

“Accept your medals,” the adviser says, handing the gold medallions to George, four heavy coins decorated with olive wreaths and the Windsor crest. George pins the medals to Dream’s shirt, feeling a strange sense of accomplishment at the stream of blood trickling down the knight’s neck. The king hands his knight the last medal, a blackened coin on a gilded chain meant to be worn at formal events.

Their fingers touch, briefly, and George jerks his hand away.

“That will be all. Thank you.” George sheaths his sword, nodding to the advisers, and walks out of the throne room, Will following closely behind.

That night, George wipes down the gilded hilt of his sword. Meticulously cleaning the spaces between emeralds and rubies, the king falters when he gets to the blade, noticing Dream’s dried blood spattered on the tip. George swallows and places the sword back on its stand.

Sighing as he shucks his shirt off, George settles into silken sheets. The king turns towards where

his sword lies. Illuminated by orange torchlight, the blood of his murderous knight casts a shadow on the otherwise pristine weapon, an ever-present reminder of the day's events.

## Chapter End Notes

hello everyone! sorry for the lack of updates. hope you enjoy this chapter where the king finally meets his knight!

i'm off school now, so i should be updating more frequently.

<https://open.spotify.com/playlist/34nRL5AY2mcoHpG1PDhdoA?si=WwWIO9w7TKmiOPehakbjbA>

here's the spotify playlist, in case you're interested.

as always, kudos and constructive criticism are much appreciated. or just say hello :)

love from the loglady <3

## Nathalie's Interlude (Strawberry Blond)

### Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for [notes](#)

Will bursts from the castle, sprinting across the wet grass until he sees her, the funny tuft of blonde hair peeking through the palace gate. Her back is to Will, and he uses the few seconds of inconspicuousness to flatten his curls and straighten his shirt, trying to mask his disheveled appearance. She turns, and his heart soars.

“Nathalie?”

“Will!”

Nathalie launches herself into his arms, dress flying up behind her. The guards shift uncomfortably, but Will cares for nothing except the woman in his arms. They stay that way for a long moment, locked in an embrace amongst the rushing of the river and the singing of blue jays. Will inhales, taking in the familiar scent of rosemary and smoke, but Nathalie pulls away, cupping his face in her hands, a childish grin spread across her features.

“Sorry I couldn’t come to the coronation,” she finally says, “I meant to send a letter. We were away.”

“I figured,” Will says, pouting a little to tease her. “We sat down for supper and the food was disgusting, so Geor—the king—sent for your father, but they told us he was off in Aberdeen.”

Nathalie and Will set off down the cobblestone path, away from the looming castle, hands bumping slightly as they walk.

“You two are ridiculous, can’t live for a *week* without food from a lowly innkeeper,” Nathalie chuckles. “Papa wanted to send a spread, but there was a tomato festival. Obviously, he saw that more important than the coronation of our king,” she explains, rolling her eyes. “You’ll have to live with the palace kitchens for the time being. He’s still in Aberdeen, I returned to take care of the inn.”

Will grumbles, “I’d have taken a tomato festival over that sordid affair anyday.”

“Was it really that bad?”

“George doesn’t want to be king, you know that. He wants to fuck around and get drunk like we used to. He wasn’t raised for this, and now he feels alone. For some reason I feel like it’s my fault... I’m supposed to be by his side, right?”

Nathalie tilts her head towards Will, a look of concern spreading across her features, and Will wishes he’d never said anything. He wishes Nathalie would smile at him in that soft way, like she knew he’d give her the moon if she asked. “You know, Will, you’re already doing more than anyone else by simply standing by him.”

“I know,” Will sighs. “And I really do believe in him. He told off the new captain of his guard yesterday and even the advisers were impressed. George is capable of being a great king—I just don’t think he understands that. He thinks everyone hates him.”

Nathalie sighs, patting Will’s arm. “I hear everything coming through the inn. People don’t *hate*

him, they just wish it was James instead.”

“I’m sure he wishes it was James, too.”

An uncomfortable silence settles between them, and Will busies himself with kicking rocks down the path, until Nathalie speaks.

“Tell me about the captain?”

“He’s a bastard. I feel like I’m to blame—he was knighted on my recommendation. Called George a pansy and insulted him to no end, but George dealt it back. It was slightly terrifying to watch.”

“That’s something,” Nathalie offers.

“Indeed.”

They walk in silence, admiring the oak trees and multicolored flowers spreading across the land. Saudade was beautiful, albeit eternally overcast by storm clouds. Clusters of townships amongst rolling hills glowed in the evening air, the sounds of cooking, chatter, and children creating a beautiful cacophony. Breathing in the combination of smoke from the approaching buildings, the hazy smell of rain, and Nathalie’s soap, Will sighs, dreading the solitary trek he’d have to make back to the castle.

Nathalie turns to look at Will and smiles. “No more palace talk, alright? It’s just us, like old times.”

Will nods, looking down at the woman who’s captured his heart, feeling a strange sense of home as he steps into the inn.

He remembers their first meeting, years ago, when Nathalie bounded down the cobbled road, school books in hand. Will and George were piss drunk, stumbling in the streets until she happened upon them. Nathalie scoffed at the two, smoothing down her braided locks before offering them hot milk and a meal at her father’s inn. George obliged before emptying the contents of his stomach onto her shoes while Will doubled over in laughter at the twisted frown that overtook her features. Shoes discarded, the blonde walked barefoot in the rain until Will offered to carry her. She looked him up and down with scorn, turned her nose up, and continued walking. Once inside, Will and George sat down at the fire, warming themselves while Nathalie explained their plight to her father. His rumbling laughter reverberated throughout the inn, and Nathalie sat down at one of the tables, still barefoot, burying her nose in parchment and books. Will stretched, rolling up his sleeves and sauntering over to where she sat.

“Need help?”

“No, thank you,” she’d huffed, trying her best to not meet Will’s gaze.

“Suit yourself,” he chuckled, returning to the fire, where George was fully passed out on the floor. Will sipped the milk Nathalie’s father had brought him, letting the steam warm his nose, watching her work until candles burned low and the fire was almost out. Nathalie leapt up from her seat, flouncing up the stairs, presumably to her room, and Will shook his head, laughing a little.

She appeared ten minutes later, with blankets and woolen comforters that were thrust into Will’s hands. “Take any empty room,” she said, smiling slightly. “If your friend needs to be carried, I can wake my father, but I’m afraid I can’t help with that.”

“There’s no need. Thank you, sweetheart.”



“Nathalie.”

“Sweetheart.”

Nathalie shook her head, willing the heat blooming in her cheeks to go away, turning back to walk up the stairs.

“Goodnight, sweetheart!” Will called, chuckling.

“Goodnight,” came the soft response.

He’d left new shoes on her doorstep a week later, wrapped with a pink bow.

*Enjoy, sweetheart*, the note had said, and Nathalie's sisters fawned over the expensive handmade leather as she read and reread the simple, yet endearing message.

She was everything Will wasn’t. Good, sweet, hardworking. She woke at daybreak to wipe down tables at the inn, she said her prayers every night without fail, she shushed the neighbors’ children at church. Flowers bloomed when she planted them, even in the cold winter months. The boy down the street brought her bouquets, laying them beside the entrance to the inn. Will made sure every time he went back down that same road, just to catch a glimpse of her soft smile, he crushed those bouquets under his boot.

Will watched her pick apples in the orchards near the castle, he watched her inspect vegetables at the market, he watched her browse bookshops. The more he watched, the more his heart belonged to her. He returned again and again, aching to speak to Nathalie, contemplating risking alcohol poisoning once again, just so he could watch her do schoolwork in the soft torchlight. He’d always bring George along, who had no problem frequenting local bars, often disappearing into a dark alley with his conquest of the week. Will joined in on the debauchery, but in his post-coital haze, lying next to a woman he barely knew, he missed the way Nathalie turned her nose up at him. He missed the soft smile, her fierce determination as she studied. He missed the way she ambled down the stairs with her braids undone, golden hair curling slightly at the ends.

One night, their paths finally crossed again, as Will and George clambered into the inn in their drunken stupor. Nathalie wasn’t in her school clothes, having already changed into a nightgown and oversized woolen socks. She raised her eyebrows at the two boys, pouring mugs of steaming cider and settling down with them at the fire. Will’s heart leaped at this, a warm feeling spreading throughout his body that he suspected had nothing to do with the hot beverage. George took a sip of his drink and promptly passed out, soft snores emitting from his chapped lips.

“Do you have a name? Or am I to just shelter you when you’re drunk without any questions asked?” Nathalie finally said, softly, humor lacing her words.

“Uh, Will,” he sputtered out, the sudden interaction entirely unexpected.

“Will.”

“And that’s George,” Will offered, smiling sheepishly.

“As in Prince George?” Nathalie asked, the smile on her face indicating she already knew the answer.

“Er-yes. Please don’t make a fuss of this, we’re supposed to be somewhat incognito.”

“Wasn’t planning on it. Although next time I wouldn’t recommend falling over in the streets if

you're trying to pass unnoticed," she said with a chuckle. "We don't have any spare rooms tonight. You can leave George by the fire, I'll find him some blankets. I'll have to sneak you into my room, if that's alright."

"Uh-yes, that's fine. Thank you."

Will paced by the fire like a madman, trying to discern what his move would be, or if any moves should be made altogether. When Nathalie returned with George's blankets, she placed a finger over her lips, shushing Will. He nodded, following her up to her room. It was cozy, nothing like the grandeur Will was accustomed to, but he felt at peace. She turned to him, eyes wide. "I can sleep on the floor?" Nathalie whispered.

"No, no, that's fine. I'll take the floor."

"Alright."

They settled into their respective beds, Will groaning at his cramping legs and sore back. A life of aristocracy had left him unprepared for sleeping on the hard wooden floor of an inn.

"Goodnight, sweetheart," Will said, his voice barely audible.

"Goodnight."

After a few more minutes of shuffling and groaning, Nathalie sat upright in bed, "well, just get in if you're going to make a fuss about it," she huffed, peeling back an edge of the blanket.

Will shot up, trying to keep his face impassive despite the intense celebration that was currently occurring in his mind. He grinned at her through darkness and climbed into bed, maintaining a respectful distance.

Heart hammering, Will settled beside Nathalie, the pattering of rain lulling them to sleep.

It became their thing, sharing a bed as George slept downstairs. Until George became the crown prince, and Will's visits grew less frequent, eventually stopping altogether. They maintained a cordial acquaintanceship—seeing each other in town and exchanging small talk—but Will didn't return to the inn. Nathalie understood, but in her heart she reserved a place for the lanky boy who called her sweetheart, hoping someday the universe would bring them back together.

Eventually, George started requesting food deliveries from Nathalie's father, so Will saw her once a week when she dropped off their goods. Their lost friendship recovered, stemming from small talk as Nathalie stocked the palace cellar and Will followed, offering to lift heavy parcels and shamelessly flirting. They started making outings together on the weekends, visiting orchards and tending to Nathalie's garden.

She was his north star, a beacon shining through the darkness of the castle happenings. Will had found his anchor.

—

Nathalie and Will eat dinner by the fire, just like all those years ago, except this time without George's drunken form slumped over beside them. Nathalie rambles about her ambitions to become a teacher in town, and Will can't help but feel a pang of jealousy. He wishes he'd get to spend life with Nathalie, but his position in the court and her exclusively platonic feelings crush Will's dreams before they even take form.

After dinner, Nathalie and Will sit for hours talking over spiced cider, laughter echoing throughout the room. Eventually, the pair make their way upstairs. Before Will can choose a room to sleep in, Nathalie holds her hand out to him, beckoning him into her's.

“Nathalie-”

“Will, it's fine. You slept next to me when you were a sex-crazed teenager, what, think you can't control yourself now?” she teased.

“Fuck you,” he breathes. “No, I didn't mean that. I just realized it's the first time I've slept here in nearly four years. I- I didn't know if things would be the same.”

She laughs, taking his hand.

They enter the small room, the same one Will spent so many nights in, keeping his respectful distance, never wanting to overstep. Nathalie shuts the door, turning around to face him, cupping his face in her hands.

“Will, you know you can trust me with anything, even the things you don't tell George.”

Will swallows. “I know.”

“Good,” she says, inching closer to him. “Also know that I will always be in your life, as long as you want me.”

“I'll want you forever, Nathalie,” Will replies, his heart pounding and brain utterly malfunctioning due to her closeness. “I promise.”

Nathalie blinks, slowly moving forward, pressing her lips to Will's. They stay there, kissing sweetly, slowly, like lovers reuniting after many years apart, until Will pulls away, studying his love. Nathalie turns her head to the side, a blush forming on her cheeks, but Will grabs her face, forcing her to look at him. He smiles as he kisses her again, and again, and again.

“Bed?” she asks, smiling slightly, after they finally pull apart, lips red and swollen. “I have to be up early tomorrow.”

“Bed,” Will agrees, settling under the covers. “Goodnight sweetheart.”

“Goodnight,” she replies, sighing contentedly.

This time, Will closes the distance between them, letting sleep take him.

## Chapter End Notes

some wholesomeness to offset our favorite overdramatic knight and king! also, will's little post nut clarity moment was so fun to write lol.

hope you all enjoyed! i loved writing this chapter.

here's the playlist: [https://open.spotify.com/playlist/34nRL5AY2mcoHpG1PDhdoA?si=BUeCu\\_mRDa2OE98UvWcVA](https://open.spotify.com/playlist/34nRL5AY2mcoHpG1PDhdoA?si=BUeCu_mRDa2OE98UvWcVA)

the first few songs are in order at this point, i've assigned a few songs per chapter. once

we get further into the story the playlist should start taking more shape.

i love all of your comments so much... please do keep them coming, they truly make my day.

love from the loglady <3

# Work Song

## Chapter Summary

TW for a little bit of violence and blood in this chapter

## Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for [notes](#)

Dream shifts uncomfortably on the hard mattress, extending his aching limbs until a pleasurable burn spreads throughout his body. It's nearly daybreak, the faint smell of fresh bread and smoke drifting through his open window. The knight rises from his bed, quickly pulling a shirt and boots on.

*It's been too long since I've been in a castle*, he thinks, mind rushing to piece together thoughts of the frozen palace in Sweden: his mother's laugh, his sister's embrace, his brother wrapping a fur cloak around him.

Fastening his mask, Dream begins the climb down from the stone tower they've housed him in, far away from the others' bedchambers. Far from any signs of life.

He enters the main foyer, nodding to the guards, who bow their heads after a shared look. Dream exits the grand doors into the crisp morning air, feeling dew seep into his battered boots. He breathes in, deeply, missing the sting of Swedish winters—being frozen head to toe and defrosting in front of a warm fire.

"England will just have to do," he says, to nobody in particular. A crow caws in response, and Dream rolls his eyes, walking further until he reaches the servants' patio, observing chambermaids doing the washing and footmen readying carriages. He sits on a log near the patio, watching through a window as a cook herds her children like cattle, desperately trying to fix breakfast for the castle's many occupants. She looks at him, visibly startled, but suddenly she's bursting through the kitchen doors, offering him bread, warm milk, and pastries. Dream happily obliges, sipping his milk and devouring the sweets, a stark contrast to the meager rations he was accustomed to on the run.

Will trudges up the path to the castle shortly after the sun rises, his eyes shining and mouth curved into a strange smile. He notices Dream watching, and a need to accompany the solitary knight overcomes him. Will nods his head in acknowledgment and eases himself down onto the log. They sit in silence for a long moment, with nothing but the sound of horses shuffling and Dream munching on his breakfast filling the air. Will turns his head to look at Dream, resting his forearms on his knees, fingers clasped together.

"Morning," Will finally says.

"Morning."

"You've been told that training starts today, yes?" Will asks. He knows the answer, knows he was the one to deliver the notice to Dream, yet hopes the knight will pick up on his feeble attempts to fill the awkward silence.

“Yes. Thank you,” Dream responds, continuing to eat.

Will sighs resignedly. “Dream. I regret that you and the king started your relationship on such... unfortunate terms. However, I do want to remind you that his life is of the utmost importance. The kingdoms live in an unstable harmony and any further disruption to the monarchy would surely lead to full-on war. We already lost Elytron, under King Henry. We can’t lose this land. You have to keep him safe.”

“I understand what this position asks of me. My distaste for the king and his utter incompetence will not stand in the way of his safety, I can assure that,” Dream retorts, clenching and unclenching his jaw. “I have seen monarchies fall at the hands of unworthy rulers,” he continues, “I hope to god, for your sake, that this is not one of them.” The knight dusts off his hands and pours the rest of the milk out onto the grass, handing the cup to Will. “Excuse me, I’m late.” Dream rises and strides away, leaving Will alone with his thoughts.

Dream walks into the knights’ quarters ten minutes later, slamming the door open. The room goes silent.

“Let’s go,” he says curtly.

They file out in an orderly manner, like a well-oiled machine. The guards fall in line, following the leader, until they reach a massive field next to the castle. Assembling into formation, they wait for their superior to speak.

Dream clears his throat.

“I’m sure most of you know why I’m here. I don’t doubt you know how to fight to *protect*, but I do know that none of you have ever fought to survive. I’m going to teach you how to fight like bloodshed is your air, like death is your life source. Then you will teach your armies. With luck, your pathetic excuse for a kingdom won’t be conquered under your pathetic excuse for a king.”

Nicholas shifts, eyes narrowing, gripping his sword harder. He clenches and unclenches his jaw.

Dream turns to him, smiling a little. “And feel free to tell on me to your king. I couldn’t give less of a fuck.”

The knights bow their heads. Dream snaps his fingers and a footman appears out of nowhere, scurrying towards him with armor and his glowing sword.

“Divide into pairs and spar. I want to see the mediocrity I’m working with,” he barks, fastening his chestplate. “Disobey and I punish you,” Dream says with a smirk.

The training lasts well into the day, until the knights are dripping with sweat and exhausted, Dream’s voice hoarse from screaming orders. Just as the sun begins to rest on the rolling hills, Dream ends the session, leaving his armor in a heap on the ground. Nicholas casts him a withering look, directing the rest of the knights towards their barracks, slinging one man’s arm over his shoulder. Dream walks towards the river, peeling his shirt off, and jumps in, letting the cool rapids dance over his aching muscles. Flinging his mask onto the riverbank, the knight lets the water rush in his ears, moss tickling his feet. Dream stays underwater until his lungs burn, and bursts to the surface, biting wind nipping at his damp skin. The trees rustle, and he whips his head around, beginning to sink into the water as if anticipating an attack.

George slowly emerges from behind a great oak tree, with a notebook in one hand and a basket of

apples in the other. His features sour when he notices Dream, who, in one swift motion, yanks the mask from under his clothes and fastens it, just before George can register what he's seeing.

George looks at Dream expectantly, almost as if he expects the knight to bow, use an honorific, *anything* other than stand menacingly, river rapids rushing around him. He sucks his bottom lip into his mouth, gnawing at it, as they stand, frozen, challenging each other to make the first move. The knight tilts his head, raking his eyes over the boyish king, and speaks.

"Long day?" he laughs. "Didn't know apple picking was so integral to court affairs. Don't you need a babysitter to leave the castle?"

George feels the pressure start to bloom in his chest.

"Court is adjourned for the day," he says calmly. "I was able to catch Nicholas for a moment after your training session. He has expressed concern about your... ah, *rhetoric*. You are aware that *I* am the one paying your monthly allowance, correct? You are aware that you serve *me*, correct?"

Dream rises completely out of the water, stalking towards George, dripping wet in the cool air. Water streams down his tanned skin as George fixes his eyes on Dream's mask, willing himself to stay grounded. The knight stalks towards his king, mouth curled into a small smirk. Dream pauses once he's in front of George, pushing the dripping blonde hair out of his eyes.

"I serve Saudade. Not you. If you would like to train your guard yourself, be my guest. I don't care if my words make you snivel like a little schoolboy. Without me, you're dead. Your kingdom's gone. You know that."

George clenches his jaw. It's not merely the biting words, it's the calm nonchalance Dream speaks with—like George is a fussy child he's scolding, like the knight is in charge rather than the king. He sets the basket of apples on the ground and locks eyes with Dream's mask once again.

"I should have you whipped for insubordination," George says through clenched teeth, "but I'm sure you'd enjoy it."

Dream laughs—a dry, cold sound, and steps closer. George can see goosebumps erupting on the knight's skin, feel stifling heat radiating from his body, smell the odd mix of salty sweat and river water that emanates from Dream.

They share a breath.

"You'd like that, wouldn't you?" Dream says, his voice a low whisper. George feels it in his bones. "You'd like seeing me all bruised up and bloody, finally put in my place. You'd like it, right?"

"Nothing would give me more pleasure," George returns, the anger in his chest roaring, dying to be released. "Nothing."

"Set it up then," Dream grins, and George is set ablaze, rage clouding his vision. "I dare you."

Dream sees the king swallow, and an overwhelming sense of *need* washes over him as he watches George's pale throat bob. He wants to wrap his fingers around George's neck and push until the king's witty comebacks and calm facade shatter, squeeze until George is a writhing, breathless mess.

Dream's inner monologue is interrupted by George letting out an indignant huff, a flush of pink settling high in his cheeks. George mutters under his breath, and Dream smiles because he knows he's won. He's won this battle, one of many, he thinks, in the seemingly never-ending war

between knight and king. He'll fight George forever, chipping away his calm exterior until the *pathetic* king knows his worth, knows better than to parade around like a god, expecting respect when he deserves none.

"I look forward to it, *George*," Dream breathes, winking at the king, same cruel smile peeking out from under the placid mask. Rage overwhelms George—filling his mind and threatening to overflow the dam he's built to keep his anger at bay, to keep Dream out. Shoving Dream back, George recoils as his fingers burn at the contact, at the feeling of cool water on the knight's tanned, warm skin. George's back flexes against the sharp bark of the tree, and he wants nothing more than to beat Dream until his knuckles bleed and his arms ache. Until the knight begs for mercy.

He yearns for battle scars, something to prove to himself that he's still human, still worthy of living.

Dream draws closer again, a low laugh building in his throat. "Not so brave now, are we, *your highness*?" George is flushed red, chest heaving at the sound of Dream's voice.

The dam threatens to break. He runs. Runs like a coward, back to the castle, apples forgotten on the forest floor. Runs like he's been running his whole life. Runs from the man that's meant to *protect* him.

Dream takes a deep breath and begins to pull on his clothes, as the sun sets over the rolling hills of Saudade. The dull ache of rage that's settled in his throat finally subsides and the knight ruffles his drying hair, shivering at the sudden chill passing through the forest. As Dream turns to locate the path, a flash of red in his peripheral vision stops him.

*The apples.*

He stands there for a long moment, church bells tolling faintly in the distance. The knight huffs, rolling his eyes, and grabs the overflowing basket, starting the trek back to the castle.

*What am I, a fucking chambermaid?*

He reaches the castle gates just as the sun begins to slip over the horizon, pinks, reds, and purples streaking the sky. Dream nods to the guards once again, who look at his basket with a mixture of confusion and alarm.

"The fuck are you staring at?"

Their heads snap forward, bowing.

Dream strides confidently through the foyer, climbing up the grand staircase, but when it splits, he hesitates.

*Left or right?*

Groaning, Dream remembers the apples and decides to turn right, causing the guards lining the halls to shift with alarm.

"Oh, fuck off. I'm not going to murder him. I need to give the *child* his stupid apples."

The guards nod, letting him pass, and Dream begins the climb up to George's bedchamber, muttering under his breath about spoiled royalty. Once he reaches the door, Dream hesitates before knocking, the guards outside the king's room casting him suspicious looks.



“Leave,” he says, clenching his fist. “I’m a fucking knight too.”

Dream pounds on the massive door for what seems like an eternity before George flings it open, soft candlelight emanating from within the grand bedchamber. The orange light casts shadows on George's skin, shirt undone to expose his collarbones. The king purses his swollen lips, glassy eyes darting from the basket, to Dream's mask, to the bed obstructed from the knight's view.

"What?" George asks, slowly, in a low tone, like he's half asleep.

“Apples,” Dream says dumbly, shocked at how *vulnerable* George looks, revealing the slightest crack in his smooth, aristocratic facade. His hair is sticking out in all directions, and Dream's shock turns into amusement as he realizes the king has been crying, red-rimmed eyes and chapped lips revealing his secret. *Pathetic*, he thinks.

No, not crying.

Dream hears it, hears a soft voice calling for George from inside the room, sees George wedge himself between the door and the wall so that Dream's view is almost entirely obstructed, sees the purple bruise that's beginning to form on George's pale skin.

*Oh.*

The knight thrusts the basket into George's hand and scoffs. “Enjoy your night, your majesty,” he says, bowing his head. Dream wants to laugh, to scream, *anything* other than see George in the midst of- of whatever he was doing.

*He grows more pathetic by the minute. Threats of attack and he's up here fucking someone?*

Dream turns and charges towards his tower, ignoring Will's greetings, ignoring bowing guards, ignoring the heat flaming in his cheeks. He slams the door shut, flinging the mask off and throwing himself onto his bed. The knight rakes his hands through his hair, pulling a little at the longer strands that curl around his fingers. A strange anger bubbles inside him, a lightning strike in his chest that spreads impossibly through every nerve ending in his body. Dream needs to *break* something, to *hurt*.

Dream punches the ornate mirror hanging on his wall, again and again until the floor is littered with glass shards and his hand's a bloody mess. Punches it for his sister, for his mother, for his father and brother and the frozen palace tucked away in the snowy mountains. Punches for George, who ignites Dream, burns him alive, enrages him to no end.

He collapses on the bed, sleeping fitfully through supper, through the night, until the church bells toll, signaling a new day.

## Chapter End Notes

thank you all for your support. i'm sorry if i haven't responded to your comment yet-i promise i will! please keep letting me know what you think <3

playlist: [https://open.spotify.com/playlist/34nRL5AY2mcoHpG1PDhdoA?si=-jp10YbOSIO5r47vAn\\_HoA](https://open.spotify.com/playlist/34nRL5AY2mcoHpG1PDhdoA?si=-jp10YbOSIO5r47vAn_HoA)

i hope you guys enjoyed this chapter! decided to write some more sexually-charged

arguing smh. keep the lovely comments coming!!!

love from the loglady <3

# Bloodhail

## Chapter Summary

MAJOR TW for blood and violence.

## Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for [notes](#)

Two weeks later, Dream's woken by two armed men blindfolding him, dragging his half-naked, half-asleep body from the tower, the same way he was taken from the frozen palace. Before they go, Dream manages to swipe the mask sitting on his bedside, fastening it securely as the guards struggle to restrain his thrashing limbs.

*It's only a few years. You'll become a man. It's just a formality, just a silly exile. It's okay, son.*

Dream's father had him dragged from his home at eighteen, eyes blindfolded and hands bound. The knight remembers his father's beard tickling his cheek as he knelt down to his prisoner, his son, and spoke those words. He remembers his mother's wails, his brother's sobs, his sister's quiet weeping. Dream remembers being thrown in the back of a dark carriage, carried far away until he broke a wooden slat and wiggled his way out. And God, he remembers the frozen winters—living on rabbit meat and shrubs, almost dying of hypothermia and nearly losing several fingers to frostbite. He remembers the old woman with long hair who took him in, feeding him strange-smelling soups and paying him to slaughter her farm animals when her joints were too weak to move. He remembers the day the hunters came, how he ached to join them, how he left the old woman's cottage without a trace. The knight remembers how he found his people, the ones who killed for sport and challenged death to duels. What would they say if they saw him now?

Dream shudders in the guards' grasp.

He opens his mouth to ask what the fuck is going on, and realizes they've gagged him too. They drag him down the stairs, robbed of his senses, and Dream goes limp, letting the stone floor bruise his bare ankles. Head lolling forward, Dream closes his eyes and allows the birdsong drifting in through an open window to lull the blazing anger coursing through his veins.

*Calm down, son. You'll never be king if you don't manage that temper.*

The knight is dragged further and further into the castle, until the putrid stench of the dungeons wafts toward him. He knows it's George before the king even speaks, having memorized the light footsteps that always seem to find him, memorized the distinct smell of pine mixed with alcohol, memorized the way the king's breathing quickens around his knight.

George speaks then, in a bored tone, as if he's being forced to attend a dull party. "Do ten, don't stop if he can't handle it. I want all ten, fair and square."

"Yes, your majesty," an unknown voice mutters.

Dream knows.

*"Set it up then, I dare you."*

George took the dare.

Dream's legs are kicked out from underneath him, bringing him crashing to the floor. His cheek hits the stone floor and the flaming rage returns, eating away at every cell in his body. Suddenly, calloused hands grab his arms and chain them to the mossy walls of the dungeons.

Dream wants to *kill*, to feel death in his hands, to make George pay for what he's about to do, but he can't speak. He can't move. He can't do anything except kneel, hunched over, anticipating what he knows is bound to come.

*Crack.*

It's everywhere. The burn starts in his back, blooming out like a desperate wildfire, begging for fuel—spreading down to his legs, sideways through his arms, up into his neck and his head. Pain wraps around Dream like a snake squeezing its prey, punctuated by a trickle of hot blood down his back. Oh God, it hurts. It hurts like nothing he's felt before. Not even-

*Crack.*

George huffs. *Why isn't he reacting?* The knight's gone still, rippling muscles the only indicator of any sign of life as the whip lands on his back. *Is he even breathing?*

*Crack.*

Christ, it hurts. Dream feels sweat pooling everywhere, the sting as it trickles down into the open wounds on his back. The knight shakes his head from side to side, blonde waves spraying sweat everywhere.

*Crack.*

"Faster," George commands.

*Crack, Crack, Crack.*

Dream's nerves scream as he feels saliva dripping out of his mouth, jaw completely slackened. The knight feels a spray of blood on the last lash, and he growls, dignity entirely abandoned. The blindfold slips from Dream's eyes, and he raises his throbbing head to find George's eyes. Brown eyes lock securely on the mask with a knowing look, delicate neck craning to watch the carnage. The knight sees more love bites on George's pale skin, marks of devotion fading into an unsightly green, and he thrashes against the chains like a feral animal. As the whip lands, Dream swears he can see George shiver.

*Crack, Crack, Crack.*

"Thank you," George says smoothly. "That will be all."

The pain is throbbing, sending shockwaves into every fucking neuron in Dream's body. He fixes his eyes on the floor, trying to control the mix of stinging, burning, aching, and rage, swirling around in his body like a cocktail of misery. George's footsteps don't recede, but everyone else clears out of the room, leaving them alone. The king steps closer, cautiously inching towards Dream's broken form. He undoes the gag with gentle hands and tosses it down on the floor.

"You'll come to learn, I always get what I want. I may be the runt of the litter, I may be the last choice, but they still worship me around here. I suggest you start doing the same."

Dream opens his mouth to retort, but finds a soft hand grasping his jaw, forcing it closed.

“I think you’ve said enough,” George breathes. “I’ve never backed out of a dare. It would have been downright rude to refuse your challenge, Dream.” His grip is painful, so fucking painful.

Dream lets his head fall forward onto George’s arm, and blacks out.

He wakes on a cutting board.

Footmen dragged him through the snowy front lawn, through the servants' patio, and deposited him on the cook’s prep table, back facing up. Cook sobbed as she inspected his mottled skin, blood congealing in the massive wounds. Upon seeing George, however, she settled her mouth into a grimace and began ordering her scurrying children around, shooting nervous glances at the king.

The older children pour alcohol over the wounds, and Dream screams, a gut-wrenching sound that rattles the very foundation of the rickety kitchen. George just sits on a wooden stool, calm expression unwavering, trying to ignore the blood rushing to his head and the aching thrum of his heart. Cook feeds Dream drink after drink, alcohol burning the knight's throat, until he’s barely conscious, throbbing pain preventing him from fully slipping into delirium. She mashes herbs and oils, spreading them over the knight’s abused back, and Dream sighs as he begins to feel a pleasurable cooling sensation chasing away the pain. After the poultice is applied, she leaves them alone, blabbering something about fetching more alcohol and slamming the door shut.

Dream moans and bites down on his knuckle, the dull ache consuming him again, eating him alive. Sunlight reflects off the snow, streaming through the window, causing the scene to look like some sort of twisted renaissance painting, with Dream’s mangled back and lean muscle almost made picturesque by the angelic light. George rises from his seat, and pads towards the knight, lay vulnerable on the table, and whispers, “you alright?”

“Burn in hell,” Dream rasps, and George knows he went too far, feeling the shame settle in his heart.

“I- I don’t-,” the king stutters, seeing the bloody wounds up close for the first time. “Dream,” he breathes, almost as if to ground himself.

“George, please make it stop,” Dream pleads, tears beginning to slip out from under the mask. “Make it stop hurting, please.”

“I don’t know how,” George says, aching to touch him, to feel his pain, to take everything back. “I can’t, I’m sorry. Please know I’m sorry.”

Dream whimpers, and begins to lift his head slowly, slamming it down on the table with a *thump*.

“Stop, stop! What the fuck are you doing?” George shrieks.

“Redirecting the pain,” Dream responds groggily. *Thump*. “It works.” *Thump*.

“Stop. Dream, please,” George says, cursing himself for caring. “Let me,” he murmurs.

Slowly, George slips his hand into Dream’s hair. It’s soft, longer than his, and golden in the sunlight. George is careful to avoid bumping the jagged wounds with his arm, and begins dragging his nails across Dream’s scalp, applying just enough pressure to cause discomfort, but not outright pain. He rakes his hands back and forth, allowing the waves to stream through his fingers, feeling a twinge of remorse at the slight dampness of sweat mixed with blood.

Dream groans at the contact, feeling himself slip into unconsciousness.

“George,” Dream mutters.

“Hmm?”

“Fuck you for whipping me.”

The room goes dark.

## Chapter End Notes

I had to do a lot of depressing research on punishment in the 16th and 17th century... Pain.

Hope you guys liked this chapter. I love all of your sweet comments... especially on the great mystery of Who Was In George's Bed ;). Thank you so much for the support. I feel like we're a little community of history nerds. :')

Spotify playlist: <https://open.spotify.com/playlist/34nRL5AY2mcoHpG1PDhdoA?si=8ZnuNrNDQ06jIIfzwusa9w>

Hope everyone has a happy, healthy, and safe Christmas/Holidays. If you're spending the holidays alone, know I'm baking cookies with you in spirit!

As always, love from the loglady <3

# Dinner and Diatribes

## Chapter Summary

sexual content in this one (oh boy)

## Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for [notes](#)

Dream delegates training to Nicholas for a week, who audibly gasps when he sees the wounds marring the knight's back.

"George did this?" He asks, voice quivering. "George?"

"Get to work, Nicholas," Dream groans, slamming his door shut in the younger knight's face.

Food is delivered to his quarters every day, soup and good meat, with flavorful spices and an aroma that wafts through Dream's door and begs him to indulge—nothing like the bland mush Cook comes up with. On day four, Dream sees Will place down the wooden tray through a crack in the door and rushes to swing it open, finding himself face-to-face with the taller man.

"Dream," Will says slowly. "Everything alright?"

"Where's the food from?" Dream blurts, cringing at his rasping voice, hoarse from lack of use.

"Oh- um. Oh- A local inn. George- His highness has food delivered from there sometimes," he says with a fond smile. "It's everyone's favorite." Will picks up the tray and thrusts it towards Dream, watching him expectantly.

"Don't say his name around me. After I recover from this shit, I'm done with that bastard. Fucking idiot can't take a few insults, how is he the one you call king?"

Will sighs, stepping into the knight's room. "Dream- Wait, where did that mirror go?"

"No idea," Dream mutters, shoveling food into his mouth, fury simmering in his stomach.

"Strange," Will muses, lost in thought for a moment. "I know you're upset about what George did, but you realize we're unwilling to relieve you of your duties, right? It's more than a knighthood or a captain's post anymore. George spoke to the advisers and he wants to take Elytron back. Their king isn't too happy about that, and we've heard rumors of a counter-attack if we even toe the line. The kingdom needs you," he pauses, choosing his next words carefully, "and if I remember our enemies correctly, George needs you too. Even if we were to relieve you, I'm not sure where exactly you'd go."

"So what am I, then? A pawn in your fucking chess game? I'm not a person anymore? Just a vessel for that pussy to prove some shit to his dead father?"

"We're all pawns, Dream. Even George... Nobody truly has free will in times of war, do they?" Will's eyes shift around the knight's room, studying the bare-bones furniture. He flicks a speck of dust off his trousers. "And for the record, you deserved to be punished the first time you spoke to

him.”

Dream opens his mouth to protest, but Will stands up, heading towards the door. “He was never meant to be king, but I think he’s doing a damn good job,” Will declares. “We’re holding a ball in a month’s time for the king of Elytron. It’s under the guise of diplomacy, but George is adamant about making it a display of strength. You’re going to have to attend.”

“He wants to throw a ball,” Dream spits, fury lacing his voice.

“Yes?”

“WHEN WE’RE ABOUT TO BE FUCKING ATTACKED?” he roars, causing Will to jump.

“Dream, I’ll leave the sword slinging to you, leave the political ass-kissing to us.”

“Whatever,” Dream mutters. “Let the pansy have his party.”

Will gives Dream a tired look, heaving the door shut.

—

It’s a full month after the whipping until George sees Dream again, stumbling upon one of the knight’s training sessions. Dream isn’t wearing armor, but his presence is formidable, even among the heavily armed knights he’s ordering around. George conceals himself in the trees, feeling like a child playing hide-and-seek, as he watches the knight swing his sword and order Nicholas to block with his shield.

“Okay, Nicholas. I’ll try to hit you, block my swing, and while I’m preparing for my next attack, hit me.”

“Got it,” Nicholas grumbles, sweat dripping down his forehead. He’s tied a piece of white cloth around his forehead to keep his hair back, and the younger knight looks downright *menacing*. George isn’t used to seeing his knights this way, in a manner that indicated they were capable of more than just disarming a man. He shudders at the thought of Nicholas, barely nineteen, killing somebody. George feels slightly nauseous imagining the young knight watching the life drain out of a person’s eyes, reveling in the victory.

They spar like brothers, not enemies; like they’ve memorized each other’s movements and can see each other’s thoughts. Nicholas counters Dream’s hits with force, power battling cunning as they move back and forth across the large field. George feels breathless watching the knights spar, practiced partners in a perfect rhythm.

Dream calls time at sunset, and George realizes he’s been watching for upwards of an hour, sat on the forest floor, eyes trained on Dream’s lithe form swinging and blocking. Nicholas grins at Dream as the rest of the knights shuffle off to their quarters, and Dream claps him on the back with a small smile.

“Good work today, Nicholas,” he says softly, none of the usual malice lacing his words.

“Thank you,” Nicholas says, starting to turn away. Suddenly, he stops, hesitating as he considers the knight in front of him. “Uh- listen. We’re going out to a tavern tonight. All of us and probably Will, if you’d like to join.”

Dream feels a laugh bubbling in his throat, wanting to unleash hell on the knights for drinking rather than attending strategic meetings with the advisers, but stops himself, his expression



softening at Nicholas' nervous smile. "Yeah, I'll be there."

Nicholas nods, turning away and shooting Dream another smile over his shoulder. "See you!"

George watches the exchange, feeling a twinge of sadness at their plans. It used to be him, drinking with Will and the knights, long ago when they were just boys. Now, they're men, and Dream's seemingly stepped into George's role as mentor to Nicholas and friend to Will. The king grimaces, trying to think of the last time he and Will spoke—*actually spoke*—about something other than policy and war.

He can't remember.

Later that evening, as George enters the palace gates, he notices Will sauntering towards him.

"Going somewhere?" He asks lightheartedly.

"Uh- yes!" Will exclaims nervously. "Going to Nathalie. Well-Nathalie's inn. With the knights- er- Nicholas and all, you know."

"Dream?" George inquires with a cool nonchalance.

"I suppose. Nicholas invited him."

"Ah."

"What are you doing for the evening?"

"Drinking myself into a stupor, locked in my bedchamber," George deadpans.

Will stares blankly at George for a moment, then offers him a weak smile. "Well, you can come with me? Dream's not guaranteed to show up, Nicholas invited him mainly so he stops sulking around the castle and acting so tyrannical during their training. It's Nathalie's inn... so you'd be safe. Besides, all your knights are there. Go change, no outsiders will notice you in commoner's clothes if you just keep to yourself."

"You've really thought this out, Sir Gould," George says with a grin.

"That's my job, your highness."

George meets Will at the palace gates ten minutes later, having dug out the clothes he used to wear as a teenager from a dusty corner of his wardrobe. The king throws a cloak around himself and glances at Will.

"How do I look?" George asks.

"Distinctly un-royal," Will says with a chuckle, fondness filling his heart as he remembers how they used to be, all those years ago.

"Perfect. Let's go."

They arrive at the inn thirty minutes later, opting to take the long route through the woods. George hears the inviting din of glasses clinking and people chattering, warmth drifting out of the building, pulling him in. For a moment, George feels like he's sixteen again, running through the streets with Will, falling over drunk in back-alleys.

They enter the cramped inn, a pink tinge settling high on George's cheeks as the warm air begins to

encompass him, flickering torches and the aroma of fresh bread creating a cozy atmosphere. George's eyes quickly flit to Dream, nursing what seems like his fifth drink, empty beer jugs strewn around the knight haphazardly. He ignores George's gaze, muttering something to Nicholas, who's rapidly gulping down beers and yelling incoherently at the other knights.

Suddenly, Nathalie bursts from the kitchen, passing around bread and sweets, laughing as the knights begin drunkenly singing praises. A smile spreads across her face as she notices Will and George standing awkwardly in the doorway. She waves her arm, gesturing for them to come in. Will lights up when he sees her, and George raises his eyebrows questioningly, eyes darting between Nathalie and Will. His friend just smiles sheepishly and turns his head to wink at Nathalie, causing her to flush. George laughs at their exchange, pushing past Will to take a seat next to Nicholas, who claps him on the back with a smile and calls for more alcohol. He notices Dream hunched over his beer, no witty insults escaping the masked knight's chapped lips. Dream's silence causes an unsettling feeling to take root in George's stomach, festering with every passing second. Will waves hello to the group, and retreats into the kitchen, chasing behind Nathalie as she giggles.

George groans, rolling his eyes. "How long has that been going on?" he asks Nicholas, yelling over the noise of thirty drunken knights attempting to play cards.

Nicholas laughs loudly, "I'd expect you to know, your high- er- George. From what I hear, our boy escaped platonic purgatory a few weeks ago and it's been nonstop- um- *bedroom activity* since then."

The king snorts, accepting a beer from Nicholas. "Good for Will," George says, feeling a hint of sadness at his lack of knowledge about his own best friend. "How's training?"

"Ah, got off to a rocky start, didn't we Dream?" Nicholas says, slurring his words. "It's been smooth sailing since Dreamie here got the stick out of his ass. He's a proper genius," he concludes, and George sees a blazing look in Dream's eyes, despite the knight's forced smile.

"You're a natural, Nicholas," Dream says lowly, eyes still fixated on the fizzing beer.

"That's great," George offers, stomach twisting at Dream's interjection.

Nicholas gives George a sloppy kiss on the cheek and laughs loudly. "Make me your queen, Georgie! Make me your queen!" he screams.

George huffs, pushing Nicholas off. "You're much too young for me. Besides, what would your girlfriends say?"

"Oh, God, you're right," Nicholas says, nodding solemnly and taking another swig of beer. "FUCK MY GIRLFRIENDS!" he screams again, causing Dream to wince.

"Alright, Nicky, I think you've had enough," George says with a chuckle, wrenching the half-empty jug out of Nicholas' hands. He sighs, falling over onto the table with a *thud*. He's asleep in seconds, leaving Dream and George alone, the rest of the knights having risen to play darts. George busies himself with his drink, sipping quietly as he watches the game unfold. Anger bubbles in his stomach, annoyed at Dream's nonchalance. *What, I have him punished and he gives up? Is this some new form of psychological warfare?*

Raucous cheers interrupt George's thought as a winner is declared. Dream slams his jug down on the table, liquid sloshing onto the dark wood.

“Do you play?” the knight asks, nodding his head towards the dartboard.

“Er- I used to,” George responds, hoping Dream doesn’t notice the slight quiver in his voice.

“Play me,” Dream says, venom twisting his voice. “We’ll have stakes. If I win, I get revenge.”

“Revenge?” George huffs. “I’m the fucking king, you can’t plot revenge because you couldn’t handle a simple punishment without crying like a baby. Besides, I’d win.”

“Play me if you’re so sure,” Dream spits, downing the rest of his drink. “Coward.”

“Fine. If I win... you’re my servant for the week,” George says with a chuckle, causing the knight to roll his eyes.

George slips off his chair, following the taller man to the dartboard. His height is imposing—George can barely see over Dream’s broad shoulders as they push through crowds of yelling knights.

“I’ll go first,” George declares, plucking darts from the board.

Dream says nothing, leaning against a nearby table, watching the king with a small smirk. A crowd of men starts to gather around them.

George hits the bullseye twice, causing cheers to break out among the crowd. His other three darts land in the small ring around the center, leaving him with an admirable score. George laughs, satisfied, and steps back from the board. The knight takes his stance, and George turns his gaze towards him, pretending not to study how Dream’s muscles strain against his shirt as he cocks his arm.

Dream hits the bullseye once, twice, thrice.

Cheers turn into a deafening roar as George’s heart pounds, smile disappearing. Dream grins at him, keeping his head turned towards the king as he hits the last two, a perfect game. The knights clap Dream on the back, but he makes a beeline to George, lowering his head to murmur in the king’s ear.

“You’re in for a treat, Georgie.”

George shudders, shrinking into the crowd, watching as Dream’s lips curl into a smile.

The party continues late into the night, with Will and Nathalie reappearing from the kitchen soon after the darts game ends. George rejoins his friend, plastering a fake smile on his face as Dream’s words swirl in his mind. *What is he planning? What’s he going to do to me?* George leans back in an armchair, nodding politely and pretending to engage in conversation with Will and Nathalie while he watches Dream conversing with a barmaid who’s slowly pouring him a drink. He dips his head to whisper in her ear and she laughs breathily, throwing her head back and exposing her pale neck. George feels anger blossom in his chest. He’d heard Will’s reports of Dream complaining about George’s sexual conquests. *Hypocrite*, he thinks, glaring at the woman currently ruffling the knight’s hair. Soon after, George loses track of Dream and allows himself to relax, slowly forgetting their exchange as more drinks are poured.

Hours later, Nathalie and Will retire, and George realizes he’s the only one still awake—knights fast asleep in various armchairs. Stumbling around in the dark, the king tiredly makes his way to the dimly lit corridor of rooms, running his hand along the wall to steady himself. He notices a door cracked open, an inviting orange glow radiating from inside the room. George slowly pushes

it open, ready to fall into bed, stopping in shock when sees *Dream*.

Dream and the barmaid.

She's laid down on a table, long, red hair fanned out underneath her. Neither of them notice the intrusion, and George stands frozen as he watches the masked knight fucking into her mercilessly, soft moans escaping his lips, louder ones spilling out of hers. George notices the angry red scars on Dream's back, feeling a twisted sense of accomplishment, realizing he's eternally branded his knight. Dream's hand is around her neck, pushing down lightly, and George's mouth drops open, tongue darting out to wet his lips. He watches with wide eyes as Dream pulls the barmaid up, forcing her head back and changing the angle of his thrusts, causing her to gasp in arousal. Her slender back is to George, and he groans softly as Dream sucks on her neck, a line of spit connecting her pale skin and his swollen lips when he pulls away.

"Look at me," Dream growls. The barmaid's hands snake around his neck, and he hisses softly as her nails press into his flesh. He continues fucking into her until he's close, flipping her around in one deft movement so he's bending her over the table, moving at an unforgiving pace. Dream throws his head back and moans loudly, and George feels his head go numb as blood rapidly rushes downwards. Sanity abandons George as he stands, slumped against the door, watching his knight come apart, looking debauched in the soft torchlight. Dream tilts his head up and finally sees the king, eyes glazed over with the same lustful look he had the day Dream caught him in a similar situation.

George locks eyes with the mask and realizes Dream is holding his gaze, the knight's mouth dropping open to let out a low moan. He prepares himself for the insult that never comes, eyes transfixed on Dream as he goes faster, shoving the girl's head into the table with a force that muffles her moans. George feels like he's no longer occupying his own body, his mind transfixed on nothing but *Dream, Dream, Dream*. They remain captured by each other's presence, eyes fixed, as Dream's thrusts go sloppy and he releases himself into the barmaid, still staring directly at George. She cries out in pleasure and the knight's head drops down, pants escaping his lips. He wrenches his head back up to look at George and licks his lips hungrily, sending shockwaves through the king's body. George snaps out of his haze, slamming the door shut and quickly darting into another room, chest heaving and face flushed a deep red.

He slowly crawls into bed, willing his arousal to disappear, but the familiar rumble of Dream's voice drifts from the next room. George is thrown back into that moment—watching his knight's lean body tense as he pounded into the barmaid, his hands, crisscrossed with scars, gripping her neck, his teeth scraping her soft skin, the way his moans grew louder when he realized George's presence.

George lets his hand inch downwards, screws his eyes shut, and succumbs.

## Chapter End Notes

can someone please teach these two how to use the lock on a door.

let me know what you guys think! sorry if the writing is a little awkward, i was nervous to write all the seggs stuff lol.

thank you for all of your sweet comments and dms on twitter <3 all of you are so

nice... i can't even express how happy it makes me :')

spotify playlist: [https://open.spotify.com/playlist/34nRL5AY2mcoHpG1PDhdoA?  
si=u7LuRRu8TwGfkzU6l1lbWA](https://open.spotify.com/playlist/34nRL5AY2mcoHpG1PDhdoA?si=u7LuRRu8TwGfkzU6l1lbWA)

thank you again for the support.

love from the loglady <3

# Coppelia

## Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for [notes](#)

George wakes with a start, head pounding as he hears the sounds of the town coming to life, wagons barrelling and children screaming outside his open window. He rolls out of bed with a groan, rubbing his eyes slowly and looking in the mirror to assess last night's damage. George's futile attempts to tame his matted hair are interrupted by a rapid pounding on the flimsy wooden door, and he rushes forward to fling it open. Will stands on the other side, looking disheveled.

"What," George says irritably.

"George, the fucking ball's today," Will whisper-screams. "It's almost half-noon, you must get back to the castle and get dressed."

"Alright, I'll leave now then," George huffs, attempting to push past Will.

Will frowns, using his tall frame to block George from leaving. "You can't go out there, the town's too busy and we don't know if you'll get noticed. It's far too dangerous for you to walk alone at this time of day."

"So what would you have me do?" George says, his annoyance increasing. The bright sunlight streaming in from the windows causes the king's head to spin as his mind slowly begins to assemble last night's events.

"Well," Will says, mouth curved into a strange smile. "I've sent most of the knights back to the castle on foot, to prepare for tonight. Servants should be taking care of everything—I left *very* detailed instructions—but I'll head back after you to oversee the finishing touches."

"After me?"

"Uh- If it's alright with you, I'd like to stay a little longer... With Nathalie. I understand if it's not possible. I know this event is very important and the King of Elytron is coming, for God's sake, I should be there instead of socializing with my- er- Nathalie, and-"

George waves his hand, dismissing Will's rambling. "Of course you can stay longer. Just please get back to make sure everything's in order. I don't know the first thing about throwing balls," he breathes, chuckling slightly.

Will beams, ruffling George's hair. "Thank you, George. Seriously. And I promise after this mess with Elytron is over, we'll sit down and talk about everything. Promise."

"Oh, alright now, don't go all sappy on me. You're starting to sound like Nicholas," George says, smiling brightly, trying to push down the nagging feeling in his stomach. *What the fuck happened last night?*

"We're settled then! I had one of the knights send a carriage here, so you won't need to walk through town. Dream's volunteered to stay back, so you'll have a knight with you, just for protection. Call on him when you're ready to leave. I'll be seeing you, George," Will says brightly, looking down the hall and smiling as Nathalie peeks her head out from the main room, beckoning for him.

George opens his mouth to protest, but Will's halfway down the long corridor, leaving the king alone with his thoughts. The memory of Dream in the soft candlelight comes into focus, and George shakes as he fastens his cloak, feeling his face burn with shame. The floorboards creak under the king's feet, and he starts walking towards the main room of the inn on autopilot, wondering how he'll get through the ten-minute carriage ride with the masked knight. Suddenly, Dream bursts from his room, shirt undone and hair mussed from sleep. George stops in his tracks, frozen to the spot once again, feeling his ears buzz and stomach twist. They stare at each other for a moment, Dream's hands flexing at his sides, but George wills himself to wrench his eyes away. Slipping past the inn's morning crowd, he makes a beeline for the backdoor, pulling his hood up, and casts a forlorn look over his shoulder, seeing Nathalie and Will sipping tea by the fireplace, utterly enamored in each others' presence. Dream materializes behind him after a moment, reaching over George's shoulder to push the door open, and the king shudders at their closeness. He quickly stumbles out of the inn, followed by his knight, trying to avoid detection as they approach the waiting carriage, footman bowing his head sharply. George climbs in, training his eyes at the floor as Dream chats with the driver, his sleepy voice drifting in from through the curtained window. The king braces himself as he hears Dream's footsteps get closer, for the ridicule, the anger, the sting of secrets unwillingly revealed.

It never comes.

Dream hauls himself into the carriage, sitting opposite the king, letting his eyes rake over George's small frame wrapped in the oversized cloak. Their knees are almost touching, Dream's long limbs taking up the space between them. One bump on the cobblestone road and they would surely collide. The carriage lurches forward, and George is thrown towards Dream—not close enough to touch—but close enough that they share a breath, George's eyes level with Dream's bitten raw lips. It's too much—the air between them suffocates George. Dream's smell, God, his smell, wraps around George's brain and stakes its claim in his mind—anchors itself firmly in every fucking neuron and stubbornly stays put. The king returns to his upright position, refusing to raise his eyes, and looks down at the floor where Dream's large feet are centimeters away from George's considerably smaller ones. *We're too close*, George thinks. Dream's size makes it impossible for George to look anywhere but *him*, which only drags up thoughts of last night's encounter. George's attempts to psychoanalyze Dream cause his cheeks to flame as he picks apart every frame of him walking in on Dream and that- *woman*.

*Why didn't he say anything?*

The carriage settles into a gentle rocking rhythm, lulling George's anxiety a bit, and he allows himself to stare out the sliver of glass left uncovered by the heavy velvet curtains. They stop for a moment, presumably to let someone pass, and George smiles at a group of children that gather to ogle at the carriage. In the distance, he sees the rushing river that surrounds Saudade—their protection, their life source. It branches off into smaller tributaries that run through the town and encircle the castle—like arteries around a beating, bleeding heart. Morning light streams through the perpetual cloudy haze, creating slivers of sunlight that illuminate the dancing waters.

“Did you like the view?” Dream asks suddenly, causing George's heart to plummet.

“Yes,” he breathes, voice sounding too meek for a king. “Uh- Yes. I was just thinking about my childhood. My brother and I—we used to play in the river.” George continues, cringing at how *submissive* he sounds, like the mere sound of his knight's voice transforms the king into a flustered schoolgirl.

Dream hums in acknowledgment, lifting the curtain a little to stare out the window. “Sweden isn't like this. It's always frozen. Always snowing.”

"It's cold here," George offers, confused at the knight's willingness to hold conversation.

"England's cold is tiring," Dream counters, brow furrowing, "Sweden is like... the cold is thrilling. Nobody dreads stepping outside, because it's downright *beautiful*. Not oppressively hot some days and depressingly dreary others."

George laughs a little. "You've put a lot of thought into this," he says jokingly.

"I've had five years to think about it," Dream mutters angrily.

"Oh," George says simply, not knowing how to proceed. Talking to Dream was like taming a beast—both the one inside him that wanted to scream furiously at the knight, and the one before him, who was seemingly enraged by anything and everything George did.

"I left when I was eighteen," Dream continues, shocking George. It's the longest they've ever gone without tearing at each others' necks. "I stayed in Sweden for another two months, then came here."

George nods, letting himself observe Dream's hands, one securely on the sword at his waist, one resting on the knight's muscular thigh. Dream clenches and unclenches his fist while talking about Sweden, voice trembling a bit as he describes home.

"I was thinking about how me, Will, and James used to play in the river," George blurts, immediately regretting speaking, but deciding to continue anyway. "Then, when Nicholas was older, after my father became king and James had to study, he joined us sometimes."

"I didn't realize you knew Nicholas as a child."

"Well, he's much younger than me, but he always hung around the castle because his father was one of my fathers' advisers," George explains, still trying to wrap his head around the fact that they were having a civil conversation. "Nicholas was my annoying little shadow," he chuckles. "Back then, we all called him Nicky. He used to chase Will and I around asking to join us, and we'd never let him, so he'd go crying to my mother and she'd feed him sweets and let him read in the library," George winces when he finishes, realizing he's rambling to *Dream*, the man who probably hates him more than his real enemies.

"Nick is talented," Dream says curtly. "Good fighter."

George nods, resuming his survey of the scenery. As they near the castle, the king's mind spins, wondering if they were ever going to *talk* about what happened, or just ignore the topic completely. He certainly wasn't going to be the one to bring it up, and Dream showed no indication of broaching the subject either. They sit in silence for the rest of the ride, exit the carriage in silence, and George mutters a good morning to the guards at the gate as they drop their heads in acknowledgment. Dream walks behind him down the path, and George can feel his breath. *Too close.*

They climb up the stairs, Dream still looming over George's shoulder, parting when the staircase splits and rushing away to their separate bedchambers.

—

Will returns later in the day, after George's servants have already started dressing him for the ball. The ballroom is downright picturesque, the giant chandelier polished to perfection, ornate floor-to-ceiling windows letting the evening light create moving shadows on the walls. Gilded torches and flowers decorate the walls of the massive room, and Will orders the footmen to begin bringing the



musicians in as guests start to arrive. Will quickly dresses, leaving Nathalie sitting quietly on his bed in a beautiful red gown, tailored to perfection. The palace seamstress owed Will a favor, and was more than happy to oblige.

Will bursts into George's room ten minutes later, Nathalie peering in behind him, and spins in a circle, grinning at the king. George chuckles, waves to Nathalie, and allows the servants to put the finishing touches on his outfit. He's dressed in deep blue, gold buttons and trim creating a lovely contrast with his jacket and pants. George ties the white shirt underneath his court suit and turns to look at Will.

"Do I look ready to kiss the ass of a sweaty old king?" he says with a laugh.

"You always do, Georgie," Will counters, causing Nathalie to let out a small giggle.

"How are you, George?" she asks softly. "You were on your fifteenth drink when Will and I went to bed."

"My head's pounding like a bitch and I feel as though I may keel over and die," he responds gruffly, rolling his eyes.

They make their way downstairs, a page announcing George to the ballroom full of earls, barons, lords, and knights. A burst of applause echoes through the room as George enters, and he allows himself a nervous shiver before plastering on a smile and moving forward to greet the crowds.

"Where is he?" George mutters to Will after escaping the grasp of a particularly *touchy* baroness.

"He'll be here soon. I heard he's bringing his children," Will responds, grasping Nathalie's gloved hand and leading her to dance.

"I meant Dream," George says, but Will's too far away, somewhere in the throng of people waltzing. George makes the rounds, pretending to be engrossed in conversations with learned men while cycling through the previous nights' events in his mind. *His hands around her neck, his moans, his body tensing.*

*What the hell is wrong with me?* George thinks, banishing the unwanted intrusion from his mind. Annoyance washes over the king as he begins to consider the very real possibility that Dream forgot about the entire event. *Not forgot*, a nagging voice reminds him, *ignored. Purposefully.*

George excuses himself from a heated debate about land deeds, making his way towards the open doors, when suddenly, Dream appears. The king stumbles backwards, shocked at the sight before him. Dream still wore the mask, but he'd tamed his hair so it was neatly curling around his neck, golden tendrils lazily falling onto his forehead. He was wearing a suit not unlike George's, but it was pitch-black, golden details resembling stars and comets in the night sky. His broad shoulders and muscular arms filled out the clothes perfectly, and the white shirt he wore underneath contrasted breathtakingly with his tanned skin. Dream scans the room and begins stalking towards George, carding a hand through his silken hair.

"Where's the king?" he huffs. "I'd prefer to get this over with as quickly as possible."

"Why," George says angrily, "have another barmaid you need to be fucking?" He regrets the words as quickly as they leave his lips, taking a step back from Dream, half expecting the knight to punch him squarely in the jaw.

Dream steps forward, and it's just them, alone in a room packed with people dancing the waltz. Just them, too fucking close once again. "You looked like you were enjoying it, *your highness,*"

Dream growls.

George takes another step back, putting a safe distance between him and the knight. "I'll have someone find you when he gets here. Try not to kill anyone in the meantime," he says, allowing the cool, practiced demeanor of a king to curb his raging emotions, willing himself to *not* think about Dream's husky voice in his ear. George stalks away, ignoring the blood rushing in his ears, distorting the sweet music emanating from the orchestral group at the forefront of the ballroom.

An hour later, the king of Elytron is announced by a page, flanked by a short girl in a baby blue dress, and a taller boy with scruffy brown hair and an innocent look in his eye.

"Your highness!" the king exclaims, waddling his portly body towards George. "Wonderful to be here!"

"Wonderful to have you here," George says with a smile. "Are these your children?"

"Yes! Yes! This is Karl. He's my pride and joy, my heir!" the king exclaims with a sleazy grin, and George can't help but feel a twinge of hurt at the way the king fawns about his son. "This is Katerina, my daughter," he says, gesturing to the girl, who smiles demurely. Stepping closer, the king leans in to whisper in George's ear. "She's eighteen," he grumbles, rancid breath causing George's nose to crinkle. "If you want my land so badly, just take her. I'll give her to you, with half my land." He pulls back, raising his eyebrows conspiratorially. "Consider it, your highness!"

Will suddenly appears behind George, Nathalie nowhere to be found. He smiles at the king of Elytron, using the same placid, aristocratic expression George had perfected. "Your highness—"

"Please! Call me Albert," he interjects.

Will nods, swallowing harshly. "Albert, Sir. Would you mind joining King George and myself for a drink? We'd like to introduce you to his new captain of the guard and military adviser, Dream."

"Ohoho," Albert chuckles. "I know all about Dream. I'd love to see that creature in person," he says, causing George to feel a surge of anger. *He wasn't a beast. Okay, fine, maybe sometimes.* "I wish for my children to join, too. Will, this is Karl, this is Katerina," he continues, gesturing to them, "maybe they can learn a thing or two about how to run a kingdom... or maybe how not to run a kingdom!" He bursts out laughing at this. George and Will eye each other and respond with a weak chuckle.

"Perfect," George says, trying to mask the fury collecting in his gut. "Follow me."

He leads the party, flanked by Will, to a small sitting room off the ballroom, surprised to see Dream shuffling in as the door closes. Snapping his fingers at a footman, Will calls for whiskey. Dream bows to George, causing the king to laugh inwardly. *When was the last time he did that?* The knight turns his attention to Albert, bowing deeply and kissing the king's hand, then Karl's, then Katerina's. She blushes when Dream grasps her dainty hand encased in a pearly white glove, and Dream throws her a cheeky grin, causing George to clear his throat loudly.

"Albert, please meet Dream. He's overseeing my knights' training and military strategy, as well as being a part of my personal security detail," George says rapidly, shooting Dream a look. Will takes a seat in an armchair next to George, gesturing for Albert, Katerina, and Karl to take their seats as well. Dream stays upright, ambling over to stand behind George, gripping the back of the armchair like a vice. Soft orchestral music drifts into the room, mixing with the crackle of the fireplace, and George is suddenly hyper-aware of the knight's looming presence.

“Dream, I am curious as to how George got his hands on you! You must know the rumors about you. Over in Elytron, we’d only dream, hah! *Dream*, of having someone of your caliber,” Albert says with a toothy smile.

“His highness King George can be very persuasive,” Dream answers, voice steady. “I saw improvements that could be made, and he was ready to accept my constructive criticism.”

George and Will share a look. *Accept constructive criticism?* Nothing about George was accepting, and *absolutely* nothing was constructive about Dream.

Albert chuckles, clapping Karl on the back. “I hope I don’t die too soon, so my boy here won’t be in George’s position. Too young to be king, you are! Too much room for error! You need a seasoned man on the throne, like your father. Shame about him- and James, too. Truly tragic,” Alber announces, with a smile that indicated nothing about the situation was tragic to him.

“My father’s loss was tragic, yes. As was my brother’s,” George responds tightly, eyes fixated on a spot six inches above Albert’s greasy head. “Although I think I was given adequate preparation to ascend the throne. Time will only tell if my efforts are successful.”

“And those efforts, unfortunately, include taking my land, don’t they, George,” Albert says with a glint in his eye. Will clears his throat uncomfortably, interjecting. “With all due respect, your highness, that land rightfully belongs to King George, through his grandfather. It’s Windsor land, no doubt about it. A military coup during his father’s time does not invalidate King George’s claim to Elytron. The only reason why we were unable to regain the land is due to both King Henry’s and Prince James’ untimely death, which called into question if George was capable to rule. Your advisers promised that once George proved his capabilities, he would be able to take back what is rightfully his.”

A silence falls over the room, and Dream shifts behind George, sending a bolt of anxiety through the king, watching as Albert processes Will’s words, Karl and Katerina sharing a nervous look.

“That’s the thing, isn’t it, Sir Gould,” Albert spits. “George here hasn’t exactly proven his *capability* yet. As I recall, people are still starving, your farms are in decay, and your king’s reputation is that of a rowdy schoolboy playing dress-up. I am only willing to relinquish land through my daughter—she is eighteen and needs to be married. If George takes her, I will concede half my land as long as I am given a position in court. Otherwise, if you step one *foot* in Elytron, I will rain fire and hell on your measly army, even if it’s led by Dream.”

George shifts angrily, ready to fire back when Dream speaks.

“Your Highness, at risk of offending a king of your... *stature*, I will attempt to keep this civil,” he starts, venom lacing his words. “King George is young, yes. He is inexperienced, yes, but he is *not* an incapable ruler. The word incapable isn’t one of the thousand words I’d use to describe him. He is strong, he is confident, he is determined. He takes risks—I’m the captain of his guard for fuck’s sake. He was the only one willing to take me, and no matter how much you attempt to flatter me, Albert, you know that’s true. Nobody would risk having me as their leader, except King George. I know nothing about land negotiation and politics, but I know one fucking thing, and it’s that his highness will get what he wants. He’s got the most to prove and nothing to fucking lose—and if I were you, I’d be terrified.”

George’s mouth drops open, and he quickly shuts it, eyes moving from the other occupants of the room, gauging their reactions. King Albert rises with a grunt, slamming his whiskey glass down. “I think we’re done here. Karl, Katerina, enjoy the ball, I will be retiring.” He barrels out of the room before Will can even begin to explain. George stands up, hands shaking, and avoids Dream’s

towering body behind him. He turns his gaze to Katerina, smiling gently, and holds his hand out to her, masking the nervous tremor that's erupted within him.

"Katerina, care to dance?" he offers, trying to soften the cannon blast that just occurred. Because of Dream.

She nods, casting a fearful look at Dream, and takes George's hand, allowing the king to lead her from the sitting room. Will stands and motions for Karl to follow him. "C'mon Karl, come meet Nicholas and the rest of the knights." Karl nods dumbly, scampering after Will, Dream's tirade shocking him, too, into silence. Dream scans the empty room, running a hand through his hair, and lets out a breath.

*Why the fuck did I just do that?*

He returns to the ballroom, slinking in to lean against the back wall and observe the animated conversation taking place between Nicholas and Karl, watching the former chuck grapes into the latter's open mouth, causing them to dissolve into a fit of raucous laughter. Will and Nathalie dance with a loving intimacy, like they're in their own world, in a different realm from the rest of the attendees. Finally, he allows himself to look at George, the king and Katerina smiling politely at each other, the blue of their clothing swirling as George twirls her birdlike frame, lifting her slightly at the music's crescendo. The dying sunlight causes purple and pink hues to reflect off the glass accents and chandeliers, making the attendees look downright ethereal. Dream's brow furrows, and he looks away, wondering why he defended George, the same George who he staunchly believed was entirely incapable and undeserving of power. Dream somewhat agreed with Albert, but something about the flickering firelight accentuating the king's hurt expression at the mention of his family—his dead family—stirred the knight, stirred the same anger he used to feel towards George.

Now, he felt it *for* George. Anger on his behalf, a protective instinct. A respect that bloomed out of George's willingness to punish his knight. He did that. He hurt Dream, purposefully, not as a retaliation; George could have easily spat out a witty comeback and laid the argument to rest. He didn't though, no, not Dream's king. Dream's king *punished* him, and for that, he deserved respect.

The orchestra swells, and George locks eyes with his knight, hands encircling Katerina's waist. Dream smiles wickedly, remembering their darts game.

He'd punish George right back.

## Chapter End Notes

here's the ball scene, i hope this was okay. been feeling a bit iffy about my writing recently :')

I chose coppelia: act 1 as one of the songs for this chapter/the title of this chapter because it reminds me of waking up after a good sleep. the swell at the ending is like when dream and george split on the staircase, leaves you wanting so so so much more. i imagine the guests at the ball dancing to vivaldi's symphony for strings, so i threw that in the playlist as well. just to clarify, each chapter has songs attached to it, the first one will be the title of the chapter, if there's another song assigned to the chapter, it will be the following song on the playlist. i recommend listening and reading, especially with the classical/instrumental songs.

i hope you're all enjoying the story. i love your comments so much, they're truly wonderful and i read each and every single one. please keep commenting, even if it's just to say hello, i just love hearing what everyone has to say.

also, i changed the title. it's much less wordy now. de profundis is a prayer, and it's also Latin for "out of the depths." sorry if the title change confused you <333

playlist: <https://open.spotify.com/playlist/34nRL5AY2mcoHpG1PDhdoA?si=dcZQC9-qQmCNR3c0afxWnw>

take care of yourselves! hope everyone is healthy and happy!

love from the loglady <3

# From Eden

## Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for [notes](#)

Much to George's chagrin, the advisers make it clear the only hope of regaining Elytron is through Albert's children, and so, in a last-ditch effort to mend fences, Will invites Katerina and Karl to stay in Saudade indefinitely, as personal guests to the king. They become somewhat of a fixture in the palace—Karl follows Nicholas around like a lost puppy, sitting on the sidelines during training and joining in on alcohol-fueled darts tournaments.

Katerina, on the other hand, is on a mission.

She stations herself outside cabinet meetings, latching onto George the moment he exits a room, dragging him away for long walks in the woods or afternoon tea in the gardens. Her presence grows suffocating, and George yearns to be anywhere but *here*, putting up with the sickeningly sweet perfume clouding his senses and the saccharine smiles she gives him—like they've got a secret nobody else is privy to. He lets her kiss him, late at night, when the palace is asleep. He lets her touch him, lets her bring him the pleasure he'd rather be receiving from *anyone* else. Well, maybe not anyone. Maybe just one person in particular.

It's rather unfortunate for Dream, whose room loses more furniture every time he's stationed outside George's bedchamber, smashing mirrors and vases into smithereens the second he's relieved of his duties and locked away in the stone tower. Anger churns within the masked knight every time George emerges in the morning, pretending like Dream can't hear everything, *absolutely everything*, from Katerina's high-pitched gasps to George's muffled moans. George just throws him disgustingly innocent looks, and Dream shifts angrily, armor aggravating the deep scars on his back, training his eyes at the floor, not bothering to bow his head to the king. *It's pathetic*, he thinks, *sleeping with the enemy because he isn't man enough to launch an attack*. Dream wants the king that whipped him, the merciless king who yearned to take back what was rightfully his. Instead, he gets nothing but dismissive hand waves and blank looks, George bending to the will of his advisers and ignoring Dream's attempts at strategic military planning for strategic *marriage* planning.

*Maybe it was a one-off. Maybe he really is just a pussy.*

Whenever Dream runs out of furniture to smash, he picks a fight, spitting fiery insults that always end with George caged in between his knight and a wall, chest heaving, until one of them breaks the silence, stalking away.

Every time, Dream physically restrains himself from wrapping his fingers around the king's pale neck and pressing down, shutting him up permanently.

Every time, George physically restrains himself from ripping the knight's mask off, forcing Dream to face him like a man.

—

“God, she's fucking insufferable, Will, she's everywhere at once and won't leave me the fuck alone!” George exclaims, late one night when he's finally detached himself from Katerina's bony grasp. They're sitting in the library, drinking by the crackling fire, Will's tired gaze taking stock of the king's tense posture and angry flush.

“She’ll leave soon enough, George,” Will says as if repeating a mantra. “Spend more time with her, perhaps you’ll even grow to like her.”

“How could the advisers say an attack would be futile? How good can their army even be?”

“You’d be surprised, George,” Will explains tiredly. “They’re good. It hasn’t been that long since Elytron was taken from your father. They still have the same men fighting. Even Dream won’t be able to outsmart them, they’re that good.”

“Fuck!” George exclaims angrily, slamming his fist down on the armchair. “I feel so fucking stationary—I’m not doing anything I should be. I should be taking my land back, planning an attack, but instead, I’m playing house with that... girl.”

“No free will during times of war.”

“I suppose.”

“Although, George,” Will says, perking up. “You’re going to be twenty-four in a few months.”

“And?” George mutters irritably.

“The advisers want you married. Katerina might be a good option. We’d actually be in a good position to *attack* if you married her. Half the land will be transferred to you, and we’ll give her father a court position, sure, but how often is he *really* going to make the trek to participate in meetings? It’s literally perfect, you’d cut their fucking army by half—half their army will be *yours*, George. Dream can work his magic, I’m sure he can. Albert won’t know what hit him when we show up looking for the other half of *your* land,” Will’s eyes darken with a crazed look, his voice dropping to a low whisper. It’s a look George has never seen in his friend’s eyes before. It’s a look he never wants to see again.

“You- you want to go against the advisers?”

“If necessary,” Will says harshly. “Just think about it, George. I can get Dream on board, for sure. We’ll wait until after the wedding, then declare war.”

“We can’t just... ignore the advisers, Will. I want to attack just as much as you, but think about the subjects... They’re- they’re fucking starving, for God’s sake. We can’t just force them to fight a war.”

“You’ll come to learn that the masses will do anything as long as we shout it loud enough.”

George shudders, Will’s words sending ice spikes into his heart. He quickly changes the subject, trying to push the unease feeling out of his chest. “You’re seriously suggesting I marry Katerina?” he grumbles, angry at his friend for not seeing reason, angry at himself for not wanting her.

Will shrugs nonchalantly, the dark look still clouding his eyes. “You have to get married at some point. Better do it now, while it can benefit you. Otherwise, people will talk. What’s your problem with her? She’s beautiful, wickedly smart, has good manners and shit... She’ll make a good queen.”

“Talk?” George whispers, anxiety creeping into his gut. “What do you mean talk?”

“George,” Will starts, “I’m not exactly sure how to word this.” He sighs, setting down his glass. “It’s customary for royals to start courting at age twenty. Your parents were married at twenty-one, your grandparents at eighteen. You’re nearly twenty-four, and, quite frankly, *need* a queen. Albert

and your other dissenters are looking for a reason to crucify you, and- well- lacking a queen would give them a damn good reason. They'll grasp at anything to smear your name."

"What about my subjects? Do- do they want a queen?"

"They are accustomed to a headstrong, rational king—your father, and benevolent, loving queen—your mother. Even the most loyal subject is bound to be a little... *antsy* for a queen and an heir. George, I- the advisers really don't want people like Albert or even your subjects getting the wrong idea—they like Katerina, they think she'll make a good queen." Will says quickly, gesturing wildly with his hands, and George slumps into his seat, rubbing his eyes.

"Wrong idea?" The king replies, feeling dizzy.

"They- they don't want people to think you don't want women... You've never even been seen with a woman, in a formal manner, at least."

"What- Why on earth would they think that?" George says with a lighthearted chuckle, trying to ignore the heavy feeling settling in the pit of his stomach.

"God knows," Will says, laughing tiredly. "If only I could bring up all the girls I've seen you fuck in our heyday, that'd show them. You're getting old, Georgie, it's time to settle down."

George lets out a weak laugh, clapping Will on the shoulder. "I'll consider it, Will. Thanks," he huffs out, heaving himself out of the comfortable armchair, ambling towards the doors.

"George?" Will calls out, still slumped over in his chair.

"Hmm?" George grunts, his head rattling with the aftershocks of their conversation.

"Leave it to me, okay? I'll figure it out with the advisers. Don't worry too much, just focus on Katerina."

"Right. Goodnight, Will."

"Night."

George shoves the library doors open, stumbling out into the vast hallway leading to the foyer. The castle is silent, torches long extinguished and guards lining doorways gently dozing off at their posts, still as statues. George shivers as he pads towards the grand staircase, stone walls offering little protection from the chilly night air. He prays Katerina retired to her own room tonight—the conversation with Will causing dread to suffocate him, a weakness he's unwilling to share with the princess.

As George nears his bedchamber, he notices Dream at his post. He inhales sharply, readying himself for the hostility, the insults, the bickering he's grown accustomed to. A woven blanket of anger, guilt, and longing settle over George every time he encounters Dream—the mixture of emotions nearly too much for him to handle. Anger at the knight's nonchalant dismissal of George's status as king; guilt at the pain George brought him, satisfying in the moment, gut-wrenching immediately after; and longing for *more*—more than just furious insults fading into tense silence, more than just terse small talk and unspoken questions floating between them. George hesitates slightly before walking into the soft light illuminating the hallway. Glancing out a window, he smiles, noticing snow starting to dust the castle grounds, serenity falling over a land destined for turmoil. It's moments like these that keep him breathing—gentle moments late at night when George can appreciate the land he's responsible for, the land he calls home. Land stained with the blood of his ancestors, their souls buried deep beneath the rolling hills, singing softly as



the river rushes around bends.

“George,” a low voice rumbles.

He jumps, tearing his eyes away from the window to see Dream, leaning against the door to his bedchamber.

“Yes?” he breathes softly. It seems wrong to talk at a normal pitch at this hour, every interaction a whispered secret.

Dream pushes himself off the door, armor shifting, and walks towards George, who’s leaning against the opposite wall, next to the window. “What are you doing?” Dream asks in the same hushed tone, crossing his arms.

“What- What do you mean?” George splutters indignantly. “Am I not allowed to walk around my own castle?”

“Could be dangerous.”

George studies the man before him intently, growing more uncomfortable with every passing second. “Is- um- is she in there?” he mutters self-consciously.

“No, no,” Dream says, chuckling lightly. “She came looking for you an hour ago. I offered my own services but was turned down... I wonder why,” he says dryly, grinning at George.

“What the fuck is wrong with you?” George grumbles furiously, envy curling around his heart. “Leave her alone, Dream. She’s a princess, for God’s sake.”

“You’re forgetting I’m a prince.”

“Not anymore,” George says harshly. “Last I checked, exiled means kicked out.”

Dream’s palm collides with the wall, caging George in. He lowers his head so that they’re face-to-face, heavy breaths intermingling. “*Last I checked*, you’re barely a king. Fucking messing around with an eighteen-year-old *girl* when you should be attacking.”

“You’re at the meetings, Dream. You know we can’t attack right now. You *know* this is what the advisers want me to do. And it’s not my fucking job to train the army, that’s on you,” George spits bitterly, watching his knight’s chest rise and fall.

Dream dips his head closer, so that they’re barely an inch apart. *Too close too close too close*. “ARE YOU A PUPPET OR ARE YOU A KING?” Dream yells brokenly, causing George to flinch. “I’ve made it clear to you and your pathetic advisers—we are ready to attack. You don’t need Katerina, I can get you all of Elytron back. I promise that. It’s up to you who you want to believe, some old fucks who can’t wipe their own ass, or me.”

Heat surges through George, a mixture of fury and something darker, something he desperately tries to push out of his mind as he responds. “I’m marrying Katerina,” he says sharply. “I need a wife, and she’s the best option. We’ll discuss further plans after the wedding, if necessary. Unless you want to get whipped again, I suggest you keep your opinions to yourself.”

“Fuck you, George. I defended you to Albert because I thought you were better than this. I agree with everything he said, you pussy,” Dream hisses. “Attack Elytron like a man, don’t hide behind that girl like a little boy. God, George, make me believe you’re better than this,” Dream growls, suddenly retreating as George angrily chews at his lip, tasting blood. “You’re going to regret

marrying her. You're going to fucking regret it."

*I know*, George thinks as he slams the door shut. *I know*.

His punishment starts the next day.

Dream avoids George like he has the plague, assigning Nicholas to guard his bedchamber, stalking away from training whenever he notices the king out of the corner of his eye. He stops showing up to meetings, stops answering his door when Will all but breaks it down, begging him to stop whatever game he's playing. George pretends to not notice; pretends to not care when he gets down on one knee with his mother's ring for a princess whose smile spells danger, Dream painfully absent from the clapping crowds; pretends like the ache he feels is just wedding jitters; pretends like it's perfectly normal for weeks to pass without so much as a fiery glance thrown his way. Weeks tumble into months as leaves decay and fall, a mossy, rained-out smell spreading throughout the castle grounds, soft blankets of snow becoming a daily occurrence. George grows detached, despite the princess' efforts, plastering on fake smiles to shake hands with Albert, securing half of Elytron as his wedding gift. They decide to schedule the wedding for late November, after George's birthday, and Katerina busies herself with meeting tailors, seamstresses, and cooks, pretending to not notice the tired look creeping into George's eyes every time she enters the room; the way Dream tenses whenever she passes him; the way Will grows secluded, mulling over maps and treaties, quickly tucking them away in her presence. The advisers are elated—with Dream no longer insisting on war, they focus on the reintegration of Elytron, setting up meeting after meeting with Albert to discuss his position in court, George watching tiredly from his throne as his kingdom is ruled by vultures scouting out their next meal. The dark crescents under Will's eyes grow as more work is piled upon him, land deals, organizing tax collections, standardizing currency. Nathalie's worried, but she says nothing, pressing her lips to Will's temple before she falls asleep, allowing him to stay awake late into the night, reading documents by the dying firelight.

*I'm a puppet*, George thinks one sleepless night, as Katerina lays peacefully next to him, dark hair splayed out on the silken sheets. *A fucking puppet, just like Dream said*. He tries to wrap his arms around her, tries to find comfort in the way she fixes his hair in the mornings, the way she says his name with a kindness he'd forgotten, the way she clings onto him like he'll give her the world. Instead, he'd found comfort in the way Dream's eyes raked over his frame whenever he entered a room, the way his knuckles whitened as he gripped his sword anytime someone merely *looked* at George too long. The king found comfort in the way his knight battled him, fiercely, unabashedly, unwaveringly.

He felt warmth bloom in his chest, not when Katerina kissed him gently, but when he imagined Dream pressing him up against the wall with force, harsh words spilling from soft lips. He misses it, misses the fighting. He misses hurling insults at Dream, releasing years of suppressed fury in waves onto his knight, who fought back with an unbridled passion. No aristocracy, no propriety, no stiff upper lip.

"George?" Katerina asks one morning, as they're laying beside each other, sunlight creating a golden outline around her small frame.

"Hm?"

"What's your middle name?"

"What?"

"I- I just realized, it's silly, really," she says with a light chuckle. "We're getting married and I don't know the first thing about you. I don't know your middle name, or your favorite color, or your favorite food for that matter."

George reaches forward, letting a lock of her hair run through his fingers. "Henry," he says softly. "My father's name. And my favorite color is blue, like the river. My favorite food is apples, probably."

Katerina smiles brightly, leaning into his touch. "Mine's Eden," she says with a laugh. "I know it's silly. I like red. I don't have a favorite food."

"Hmm," George hums, leaning forward for a kiss. "That's okay."

The citizens are mindlessly overjoyed at their king's engagement. Merchants offer goods for the wedding and women sew furs and finery to leave by the castle, a welcome gift for their soon-to-be queen. George tours through Saudade with Katerina, waving to crowds and accepting bouquets. Dream is noticeably, painfully absent, his looming presence nowhere to be found as George steps into the carriage, wishing his knight was opposite him rather than his beaming fiancé, staring at the crowds with childlike wonder.

George's birthday arrives, and he insists on having a small gathering for the sake of focusing on wedding planning. Katerina obliges, busying herself with coordinating food from Nathalie's inn, finding solace in the latter's calmness; her unconditional love; her whispered assurances that George is just stressed, not unfeeling.

The party is modest, just castle-dwellers plus local lords and barons congregating for a simple dinner. George yearns to invite Nicholas but feels a pang of some unplaceable feeling, realizing the last time he sincerely spoke to the young knight was months ago at the inn, ultimately deciding against it. *He's got Dream now.*

George is in the midst of forcing a pained smile as Katerina feeds him cake when Dream bursts through the door of the dining room with Nicholas in tow, laughing jovially. They stop dead in their tracks at the sight before them—Will, Karl, Nathalie, George, Katerina, and twenty aristocrats gathered around the decadent spread.

"My apologies, your majesty," Nicholas says with a bow and a wink to George, seemingly unhurt by his lack of invitation. "We thought the party had ended."

George nods weakly, eyes trained on Dream, who's already halfway out the door.

"You idiot, come eat cake," Karl says with a giggle. Nicholas beams and sprints towards the table, clapping Karl on the shoulder. "Happy Birthday, Georgie," he whispers to George, who snaps out of his reverie to accept a hug from the young knight.

"Dream!" Katerina calls, "come eat, love!"

Dream turns around cautiously, and the party goes silent. "I'm so sorry, your highness," he says, plastering an unsettling grin on his face, venom lacing his words. "I've just realized I have separate matters to attend to. Thank you very much for the invitation. Have a good night."

George stands, rooted to the spot, as Dream bows, turning to exit once again.

He glances at Katerina, kissing her softly on the cheek, and begins to disentangle himself from the crowd around him. "I've- um. I've got to go. Kate, love, thank you for the party. Thank you all for

coming,” George blurts hurriedly, running towards the door. Running after Dream. He catches the beginning of his fiancée's shaky apology to the guests as he bursts through the doors, scanning the foyer for Dream, who's hurriedly making his way towards the grand staircase.

“What the fuck, Dream?”

The knight jerks his head towards George noncommittally and resumes walking.

“DREAM!” George all but screams, feeling like an indignant child as he stalks towards the knight.

“What?” Dream says, turning around fully now, mouth twisted into a grin.

“You don’t show up to meetings. You don’t fucking guard my bedchamber—you assign Nicholas, who’s significantly less experienced than you, to do it instead. You- you haven’t said a fucking word to me nine weeks!” George huffs angrily, gesturing wildly.

“So? You negotiate land in those meetings now, I’m not needed for that, and Nicholas is perfectly capable, he’ll be fine.”

George blinks rapidly.

“Is that all, *your highness*?”

“Why are you fucking ignoring me?”

“I didn’t realize you needed my constant attention. Are you really that fucking needy?” Dream spits, grin falling from his face as he shifts closer to George.

“No,” the king starts angrily, “I don’t need shit from you. I need you to do your job, actually, and part of it includes guarding me. Personally. I expect you posted outside my bedchamber tonight, Dream,” George huffs with a tone that he hopes conveys dominance.

“This is your punishment, Georgie. Consider yourself lucky I didn’t decide to use any of my other tricks on you. I’m saving those for a later date,” Dream says darkly, his voice taking on that dangerous tone reserved specifically for George.

“What the fuck? What- From the darts game? My punishment is you *ignoring* me? I’d hardly call that a punishment,” George scoffs, his features remaining impassive.

“Oh, but it is, George,” Dream says lowly, crowding the king into the curtained wall beside the staircase. George’s back hits the plush velvet and he lets out a breath, watching as Dream’s tongue darts out to wet his lips. “You’re here, leaving your own birthday party that your fiancée organized, chasing after me because- what? Because I haven’t insulted you for a few weeks? Isn’t that a little *pathetic*? Isn’t that just a little *embarrassing*? Or are you so used to the humiliation that you’re fine with begging for my attention like a needy bitch?”

George sees red. “I’m not fucking needy,” he growls. “This has to stop. I won’t have the captain of my guard playing childish mind games.”

“Really?” Dream says softly. “I was under the impression you liked the games I play.”

George rolls his eyes, raising his arm to shove Dream away.

The knight catches it deftly, holding the king’s wrist as his hand limply flops down. Dream releases him roughly, causing George to flinch.

“If you aren’t needy,” Dream says, moving forward so his lips are adjacent to George’s ear, “why do you like this?” he questions, bringing his hand to George’s neck, curling his fingers around the soft skin, causing goosebumps to erupt across the king’s entire body. “Why are you standing here, practically *begging* for me with that fucking look in your eyes, rather than calling for help? Why do you walk around with those *obscene* bruises on your pretty little neck, throwing them right in my face? If you aren’t needy, why did you watch me fuck that girl? *Why did you wish it was you?*”

Dream’s voice causes George’s breath to hitch, sending shockwaves throughout his body. He screws his eyes shut, willing himself to gain composure, praying the warmth spreading in his stomach is anger and not arousal. George feels electrified—little lightning bolts stemming from where Dream’s slender fingers connect with his pale flesh. He feels himself flush at Dream’s gaze, feels his cheeks go red as the knight takes a deep breath, hot air tickling his skin.

“*Don’t marry her, George,*” Dream chokes out roughly. “Let me get your land back. I promise you I’ll get it back. God, George,” he says, voice softening. “For once in your life, do something extraordinary.”

George’s stomach lurches and he feels his heart pound against his ribs, watching the knight’s muscles tense, feeling Dream’s fingers tighten as they stand locked in their strange embrace. It feels safe in the most enthralling way. George feels safe with another man’s fingers quite literally wrapped around his throat.

*If only my father could see me now.*

“Get the fuck off me,” George says, expression hardening. “I’m marrying her. What happened in the inn- it’s stupid. I was drunk out of my mind, I didn’t even know where I was. We don’t have to talk about it.”

“George,” Dream starts.

“Please, Dream. Please let me go.”

Dream releases him after a beat, chest heaving.

The knight stands still, towering over George, who’s unwilling to move, unwilling to leave the warmth they’ve captured between them.

“Come to the wedding, please,” George whispers, shame collecting in his gut.

“Yes, your majesty. I’d be honored,” Dream spits, stalking away, taking the stairs two at a time, leaving George in darkness, painfully hard, painfully alone.

When the knight returns to his bedchamber, his brain’s on fire and his heart’s pounding with a mixture of anger and furious longing. Will’s sitting on the floor outside, halfway through a bottle of something that smells deadly, looking almost feral.

“Dream,” Will breathes. “How do you feel about starting a war?”

## Chapter End Notes

hi everyone! hope you enjoy this chapter :)

sorry for the delay, this one was a beast to write. i hope you're all doing well and taking care of yourselves, and had a happy new year!

playlist: <https://open.spotify.com/playlist/34nRL5AY2mcoHpG1PDhdoA?si=AFQEaYCBRbG5vd30alQFeQ>

let me know your thoughts!! i've been trying to respond to all the comments, i promise :)

love from the loglady <3

# So Long Forever

## Chapter Summary

TW for blood, kinda violence, and sexual content

also this chapter is kinda religion heavy if that makes you uncomfortable

## Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for [notes](#)

James Henry Windsor died on a warm summer evening, a year after his mother and a year before his father. They say burying a child is a pain felt deep as the sharpest knife, but nothing could have prepared King Henry for the harrowing chill, the somber creak of the hall doors opening as he sat on his throne. Nothing could have prepared him for Will and George stumbling into the room, crestfallen, the latter's face contorting with pain as he fell to his knees on the cobbled floor.

When George invited James to go swimming, he had no idea his brother would shake his head, laugh a little, and decline for the sake of a cabinet meeting.

When George insisted, even getting Will to join in on the pleading, he had no idea his brother would say no again, softer this time, and explain that he was needed in court—today was the day he'd finally receive jurisdiction of his own land, his own section of the army. He'd finally play a bigger role, finally put all those years of studies into action. The advisers called it a trial period, a test to see if he'd actually be fit to rule in the event of his father's untimely death. "That'll never happen, James," his father had said jovially, "I'm not dying until I get to see all twenty of my grandchildren. Yes, twenty."

When George begged him again, asking him to push the meeting, he had no idea his brother would relent, running off to find a secretary to alert King Henry he couldn't make it today.

When George jumped into the river, he had no idea James jumped in after him.

When George faced strong rapids pulling him towards sharp rocks, he had no idea that years of playing with Will had made him a strong swimmer, while years of solitude and studies had made James considerably weaker.

When George climbed onto the shore, grinning at Will, he had no idea his brother had already drowned, a splatter of red on the sharp rocks the only indication of the crown prince's former presence.

"Jamie's dead," he'd sobbed, screamed, covering his face with his hands and digging his nails into his scalp, feeling the chilling dampness of his hair, desperately trying to wake up. "He's dead, father. He's *dead*."

Elytron seceded the next day, dissatisfied with their alleged inferior treatment, tired of being second best to the prosperous Saudade, angry at a king who spent a year mourning his wife while his subjects starved. It was a military coup, so bloody that Saudade tumbled into ruin while Elytron rose like a phoenix from the ashes. Albert led the citizens of Elytron to fight against the very king

that gave him a chance, the very king that plucked him from obscurity to become a respected adviser in his court.

They were a nation united, until one man decided it wasn't good enough.

King Henry died with his elder son, the strong facade he'd built up after Anastasia's death crumbling to ruin the second those damned words left George's lips. He was no longer a king, no, kings were God-adjacent men who ruled fearlessly. Henry became a fearful man, a vindictive, cruel, unfeeling man who hated his younger son for dragging James into an adventure he wasn't meant to partake in—hated his younger son for guiding James astray. He hated George with a passion, hated him until his dying day, and while his kingdom rebuilt, Henry became a mere shell of a human being.

The day death took him was the happiest he'd been in years.

George visited his brother's grave often, with Will, never alone. He didn't trust himself alone. They'd have lunch together, leaving a piece of bread or some sweets for James. Every time, George whispered a soft hello, pressing his hands to the cool stone, long enough for a shiver to run through his body. He'd take off his boots, letting the bone-chilling cold of the crypt seep into his woolen socks, longing to feel something other than the dull ache of loss, the ache of his father's rejection, the ache of being alive but barely living. Will would leave notes for James, scribbled letters sealed with the Windsor crest. George remembered stumbling upon Will a month after James' death, hunched over in the library, scrawling on what seemed to be his tenth paper of parchment, tears blurring the inky letters. Will looked up at George, glassy, red-rimmed eyes having lost their mischievous gleam, asking "was it our fault, George?"

They'd fallen into each other's arms, and it seemed like there would never be enough tears in the world to mourn James' loss.

—

"George, love! Hurry up! We're going to be late!" Katerina yells through George's bedchamber, twisting around uncomfortably as servants fasten her corset. George stumbles into the dressing room clumsily, running a hand through his hair as he takes in the sight before him—his fiancée dressed in a pale pink gown with frilly lace gloves, hair pinned back tightly, staring at George as if he'd just landed from another planet.

"What are you doing, love? We have to be at church in ten minutes!" she says, voice turning shrill. "Please get dressed." Katerina sprays perfume in a nauseating cloud and steps down from the velvet stool as a soft knock sounds on the door. Nathalie peeks through, smiling brightly as she clasps Katerina's hands in her own, giving George a gentle nod.

"Ready?" she inquires, eyes shining.

"Just about," Katerina replies with a smile, "I think I'm just going to go ahead without George, he's barely dressed."

Nathalie nods thoughtfully as Katerina steps through the doorway, servants and ladies-in-waiting in tow. She glances towards George as he begins pulling a shirt on, dismissing the servants itching to assist him. It's freezing out, and they'd lit a fire in the massive fireplace opposite his bed. He steps closer, allowing the heat to spread through his body.

"Nervous, George?" Nathalie says, taking a seat on a spare ottoman.



“Just a bit,” George replies tersely. “It’s only confessional, after all.”

“Mm,” Nathalie hums. “I wonder who started that, anyway. Confession before marriage.”

“My grandfather,” George says, deftly fastening the buttons on his coat. “He wanted to ensure we were free of sin before marriage. My whole family did it, even James, before...”

“He was engaged?” Nathalie questions, hand flying to cover her mouth.

“Yes.”

“I-I’m sorry. I didn’t-”

“I hardly knew her,” George blurts, cringing at his admittance. The truth was, he didn’t *want* to know her, didn’t want to know the woman that would steal his brother away more than the crown already did. “Her name is Margaret. He called her Maggie.”

“George...”

“She writes to me every month, Nathalie,” George turns, tears welling in his eyes. Nathalie's already on her feet, wrapping him in a fierce embrace. He trembles for a few seconds and the dam breaks, tears rushing down his cheeks. “She- she came to the funeral and I- I could barely look at her. She left right after, packed all her things overnight, and went home. She made him so happy, and I can’t even open her letters,” he mumbles, letting his head rest on Nathalie's shoulder.

“One day,” Nathalie whispers. “One day you’ll open them and you’ll go read them to James. You’ll go sit in front of his grave and read all those letters to him. Promise me.”

George nods, tears silently streaming down his cheeks. He’d forgotten how this felt. Forgotten how it felt to sob, to scream, to release all the anger and sadness and betrayal and inadequacy that had festered inside him since the day he tried on the crown, all those years ago in the abbey.

Nathalie pulls away, smiling sadly. “Let people love you, George,” she says, turning towards the door. “Don’t be late, Katerina’s expecting you for tea afterward.”

George turns away as she silently shuts the door, scrubbing at his eyes until all traces of the emotional downpour have vanished. He finishes getting dressed, dusts off his shoes, and shoves them on. Grabbing the heavy cloak strewn over an armchair, he pushes the door open and descends from his bedchamber to the waiting carriage.

“Your highness,” a servant says with a bright smile, “her majesty Princess Katerina has already set off for the abbey. I assume you are headed there as well?”

“Yes, thank you,” George responds curtly, stepping into the carriage, heart plummeting to his stomach.

He arrives a few minutes later, shuddering as he realizes the last time he stepped foot in the hallowed abbey was for his coronation, finding excuses to skip mass every week following the ceremony. Katerina’s waiting at the entrance as he exits the carriage, and George presses a chaste kiss to her cheek, ignoring the worried look she’s giving him.

“I go in first, then you,” she says in a hushed tone, casting an apprehensive glance into the darkened halls.

“Alright. I’ll see you after.”

George settles himself into a pew as Katerina steps into the small room. He hears soft murmurs emanating from the chamber, her voice echoing gently off the stained glass windows. Sunlight streams through, casting multicolored shadows onto George's skin. He stretches deeply, wiggling his toes, trying to banish the chill as he studies the massive painting that stretches across the sides of the abbey, images of angels flying among the night sky, protected by their savior. Pillars line the main room, connecting to the ceiling, a deep blue crisscrossed by golden rafters. At the forefront of the church, a massive stained glass window featuring crying angels throwing themselves at the feet of the Lord, a massive orange sun presiding over the land. George busies himself with tracing the lines of the pillars and windows, leaving no artwork unobserved. He misses the routine tranquility of Sunday mornings, wedged between his mother and brother, listening to the Archbishop drone on and on as his stomach grumbled. James would kick his feet playfully, and George would bite his sleeve, masking his giggles as his mother threw the children indignant looks. His mother would close her eyes during the prayers, her voice soft yet firm with concentration, and George would stare at her porcelain features as they prayed, prayed for peace, for prosperity, for health.

*A lot of good that did us.*

He remembers one prayer, in particular, the one they recited at King Charles' burial, as his massive coffin was lowered into the crypt a stone's throw from the abbey. It's where his father's buried, next to his mother, next to James.

*De profundis clamavi ad te, Domine;*

*Domine, exaudi vocem meam.*

*Fiant aures tuæ intendentes in vocem deprecationis meæ.*

*Si iniquitates observaveris, Domine, Domine, quis sustinebit?*

*Quia apud te propitiatio est; et propter legem tuam sustinui te, Domine.*

*Sustinuit anima mea in verbo ejus: Speravit anima mea in Domino.*

*A custodia matutina usque ad noctem, speret Israël in Domino.*

*Quia apud Dominum misericordia, et copiosa apud eum redemptio.*

*Et ipse redimet Israël ex omnibus iniquitatibus ejus.*

They'd recited it in Latin, reading from minuscule prayer books bound with rough leather. George remembers his father's sigh as King Charles was lowered into his resting place, remembers his mother's features furrow with worry. He remembers James shifting uncomfortably, unable to stand still. He'd recited the prayer four times in his twenty-four years of living, each time, fewer voices joining in until it was just him, alone at King Henry's funeral, surrounded by advisers, flanked by Will.

Just George, reciting the prayer he'd memorized as a twelve-year-old.

*Out of the depths I cry to You, O Lord; Lord, hear my voice.*

*Let Your ears be attentive to my voice in supplication.*

*If You, O Lord, mark iniquities, Lord, who can stand?*

*But with You is forgiveness, that You may be revered.*

*I trust in the Lord; my soul trusts in His word.*

*My soul waits for the Lord more than sentinels wait for the dawn.*

*More than sentinels wait for the dawn, let Israel wait for the Lord,*

*For with the Lord is kindness and with Him is plenteous redemption;*

*And He will redeem Israel from all their iniquities.*

Katerina bursts from the small room, smiling gently at George, the sound of her heels clicking reverberating off the tall ceilings. She kisses him softly on the cheek and grasps his hands in hers, gazing into his eyes as she stands before him. They stay that way, eyes locked, for a long moment, George clinging to her the same way he remembers his father reaching for his mother. For a moment, it seems right.

Just for a moment.

“I’m returning to the castle, George. I have a seamstress to meet with for my final alterations. You’ll be alright, yes?”

“Yes, yes. I’ll see you tonight,” he mutters, releasing her. Katerina begins to retreat, wrapping her furs tightly around her as a guard heaves open the door. George sees a flash of white out of the corner of his eye, and whips his head around rapidly, causing her to look back at him with alarm.

“Nervous?” she asks, laughing lightly. “You’ll be fine, love, just go.”

He offers her a weak smile, walking towards the confessional chamber. Lowering himself down onto the seat, he casts a glance at the divider between him and the archbishop. The small wooden chamber is absurdly claustrophobic, and George grows nauseated at the thought of confessing his sins, too many for even the Lord to forgive.

“Forgive me father, for I have sinned,” he chokes out, his voice a trembling whisper. “I- I have been neglecting my duties to my betrothed. I have been neglecting my duties as a friend to William, to Nicholas. They work tirelessly for my kingdom and I- I can’t even bring myself to face them.” George inhales deeply, mustering the courage to continue. “Father, I have been a weak king, I have let myself be swayed by the words of others, I have neglected my faith and my trust in the Lord. I have let- I have let- *lust* and soul-crushing guilt cloud my judgment,” he mutters, shutting his eyes. The king drops his head, letting his hands cover his face as a warm flush spreads across his cheeks. “I have let shameful lust get in the way of my duty as king. I- I am to marry this woman, this *girl*, but I can barely bring myself to touch her. It’s eating me alive, father. All the while, I’m hurting the very person I *crave*, and I can’t fix it. I look in the mirror and I’m terrified of myself, I feel as though I must be broken, defective, lost and confused. I need to devote myself to her but every time she speaks all I can think of is how much I’d rather it be... I have the most beautiful woman before me, ready to be my wife, and I cannot fucking stand her.” He’s fully shaking now, laughing scornfully.

“So don’t marry her then,” a voice responds, chuckling softly.

The blood drains from George’s face, and he feels his stomach lurch.

“What?” he manages, whispering hesitantly.

“I told you not to marry her, *your highness*.”

His heart sinks.

“Dream, what the fuck? Where’s the archbishop? What the fuck?” George’s voice raises manically, goosebumps erupting across the back of his neck. They’re still sitting beside each other in the confessional chamber, separated by the thin barrier, and George is much too terrified to move, knuckles whitening as he grips the wooden bench.

“Lunch break, perhaps,” Dream says nonchalantly.

“How long have you been fucking sitting there?” George barks, masking his fear with fury.

“Long enough to know that at least you’re self-aware,” Dream responds, shifting in his seat. “Long enough to know that you want to attack just as much as I do, that you think it actually *is* a good idea.”

“Yes, well,” George mutters, “we can’t exactly do that, can we?”

“I also heard that bit about shameful lust,” Dream continues, his voice dropping. “I’m just wondering, pondering really, who his royal highness is *lusting* for.”

George stops breathing altogether, raising his eyes to the heavens, begging for some godly intervention. He still can’t bring himself to move, Dream’s voice holding him down firmly.

He hears the opposite door creak, and Dream leaves the chamber. George lets out a breath, his racing heart settling until the door slides open.

Dream is standing before him menacingly, sword in hand. George stares up at him from his seated position, taking deep breaths, trying to think of an explanation.

The knight clears his throat, speaking in a low, dangerous tone. “Didn’t they teach you how to behave? When they prepared you to be king? No *lusting* when you should be tasting wedding cakes,” he tuts, taunting the king. “Oh right,” Dream continues, chuckling to himself, moving closer to George as a hunter stalks its prey, “you weren’t even supposed to be king, *Georgie*.” Dream shoves the sword underneath George’s chin, dangerously close to drawing blood.

George clenches his jaw as anger courses through his veins, flexing a hand under his robes, “what did you call me?” He gives Dream a chance, a chance to take it back, a chance to live.

“I’ll call you whatever I want because I can do whatever I want. Isn’t that right? You’re going to let me attack Elytron, and you’re not going to marry that bitch, because of your fucking *shameful lust*, right, *Georgie*? I see the way you watch me, I notice *everything*. Do you really think I don’t know how badly you want me? Do you really think I don’t know every argument’s an excuse to feel my hands all over you?” Dream’s grin is visible now, dimples breaking his sharp features. The knight’s chest is heaving, yet his tone is even. A flush creeps up the king’s neck, fury simmering at his core.

“You know nothing,” George scoffs, voice level, “I’ll have you hung for hearsay.”

“When were you planning to tell Will you’d rather suck him off than talk about treaties?” Dream asks, laughing openly.

“Fuck you,” George growls, surging forward and batting the sword out of Dream’s hand. It clatters loudly onto the floor as the king takes a hold of his knight’s mask, ripping it harshly from his face. They stare at each other in shock as George stumbles backward.

The king gapes at the pretty lips that spew ugly words—gapes at the piercing green eyes that show no evil, despite belonging to such a cruel man. Light, silver scars mar Dream's right cheek, sharp features causing the cuts to look jagged. His lips are red and full, small pockets of blood staining the flesh where he's bitten it raw. Dream is *beautiful*, George thinks, eyes raking over his soft, freckled skin. He curses himself immediately, banishing the intrusion from his mind. The knight shifts angrily, and the rustling snaps George out of his delirium. George finds himself holding Dream's gaze, raising his arm, and punching the knight squarely in the jaw.

He does it again. And again. And again.

Dream doubles over, clearly in pain, then looks up at George through his eyelashes, smile stained red with blood. George bends down so his mouth is level with the knight's ear and hisses, "You will *never* address your king in that manner again. You're a servant. Nothing more."

"Nothing more?" Dream spits.

"No," George says curtly, releasing Dream, watching smugly as the knight winces, attempting to steady himself, looking around wildly for his mask.

Dream wipes the blood off his lips and stalks forward, grabbing George by the neck, easily throwing the smaller man against the stone wall. "Don't move," Dream growls, holding George with one hand, casting a glance over his shoulder to scan the abbey for guards. "Don't even think about moving."

George opens his mouth to protest but finds himself rooted to the spot, mute, feeling warmth spread throughout him at the familiar embrace. Dream feels George's pulse in his palm and presses harder, other hand finding George's hip and squeezing harshly. *He wants blood*, George thinks. *He's going to skin me like those animals*. George begins to choke, small gasping noises echoing through the church as his face goes numb and his hands claw at Dream's shirt.

George's gasps send blood to the pit of Dream's stomach, and the knight groans at the arousal. *Not now*, Dream thinks. *Not for George*.

Dream is sweating, soft sunlight highlighting the droplets that cling to his hair. George wants to lick the sweat off him, feel the salt on his tongue. He tastes metal instead, as Dream slams the king's head against the wall, blood rushing into George's mouth.

"So pathetic," Dream growls. "You're pathetic. You need to be put in your place, your *highness*."

George promptly knees him in the stomach.

The knight releases the king's throat in shock, and George spits, spraying Dream's face with blood. Dream pauses, studying the man before him. He studies the king's slim chest, heaving beneath the loose white shirt. He studies the way George's collarbone barely peeks out, a dusting of fading love bites peppered across his skin. He studies the wide eyes locked on his, waiting for the knight's next move as if in a chess game.

"What would your subjects think, *your highness*, if they knew their beloved king was nothing more than a common cocksucker?" the knight recovers, crowding George again, and God, all Dream wants to do is *destroy* the man in front of him.

George blinks, moves closer to Dream's ear, and whispers, "you'll be dead by dawn."

Dream feels the blood rushing again, down down down. All forms of sanity rapidly abandon him as George's gaze finds his. The knight slowly raises his hand again to meet the milky skin on the

king's neck, feeling the familiar flutter of George's heartbeat under his calloused fingers.

"Kneel," Dream breathes.

"No."

Dream growls, and this time, George is fully hard, aching to see how the knight moans from pleasure rather than pain. The knight grabs his king's hair, pushing him down, and George lets out a gasp, sinking to his knees on the freezing stone floor. Dream wrenches George's head up to meet his gaze, and when he speaks, his tone is even.

"I think," Dream swallows, dragging his sleeve over his face to wipe the blood, "that ego of yours has grown a little... ah- inflated. You think you know more than me. You think you can *hide* things from me."

"So what?"

"So you deserve to be punished, properly this time."

"Excuse me?" George breathes, looking up at Dream through his eyelashes, and Dream nearly loses his mind at the sight of the king, *his king*, kneeling before him, lips shining with spit and blood, eyes glazed over with lust.

"You're so needy. Always so fucking needy for me," Dream whispers, and George sees it. Dream's hard, almost painfully so, straining against the tough material of his pants.

George breathes in sharply, and the two men stare for a long moment. The king's half-lidded eyes turn upward—brown finding green—with nothing but the hollow crackle of torches to fill the suffocating air. Dream's pupils are blown wide—so wide, his eyes are almost entirely black, green slivers the only remaining indicator of humanity.

George whimpers, a soft sound, and Dream grabs his chin harshly, turning it uncomfortably upwards. Dream grows closer and closer, lips ghosting against George's cheek until they meet his ear.

"We're in a church, George," Dream says softly. George feels Dream's pulse through the knight's fingers, and he's sure Dream feels his unsteady heartbeat fluttering. He wills their heartbeats to sync, wills their blood to rush in unison, prays for *more*. The knight lets out a choked whisper, a phrase that's gone just as quickly as it leaves his raw lips.

"*Worship me.*"

"Worship me," Dream says again, almost begging, pleading for touch, anything to cease the fire that's erupted within him.

"Worship me," he repeats, this time a cracked sob, pressing his lips to George's ear. "Worship me, your highness."

George pushes Dream back, but fists his hands in the knight's shirt, holding him close enough to feel the warm breath fanning across his skin. They stay that way for a moment, looking at each other, almost asking, "*are we really doing this?*"

The king surges up, tangling his hands into the soft blonde hair, and slams their lips together roughly. Dream's hands fly to his waist, gripping him like a vice, pinning George to the wall. The kiss isn't sweet nothings, it isn't soft touches and gentle whispers, it isn't fucking sunshine and

picnics and joyful declarations of love. It's painful. So fucking painful. It's teeth and tongue and *violence*. It hurts George to his very core, sending gut-wrenching *shame* to mix with the arousal flowing throughout his body as Dream sucks, bites, licks, *attacks* his swollen lips, allowing his hands to roughly explore every inch of George's body.

An alarm is going off on George's head, telling him to run, to flee, but he's waited so long, so fucking long for something he'd never thought would come. Dream breaks away for a moment, saliva giving his lips a glossy sheen, and shuts his eyes.

"Stop, George," he whispers, moving his hand to tug on George's hair, bringing their bodies together. It's almost gentle. Almost.

George presses his lips to Dream's firmly, gripping his face with both hands. Dream moans through the kiss, and George feels it in his heart, his stomach, his bones, feels it everywhere.

"Tell me to stop," Dream says brokenly. "Tell me."

"Shut up," George growls, biting Dream's lips until he tastes blood. He revels in the taste, revels in swiping his tongue across the wounds he's created.

Dream groans again, attacking George's neck, biting him harshly before sucking away the pain, causing George's knees to buckle and his muscles to slacken. "Fuck you," Dream whispers into George's skin, before diving in to kiss his neck dirtily. "Fuck you fuck you fuck you."

"Likewise," George mutters, allowing his hands to trail down Dream's sides, tugging at his loose shirt. "Take it off," he says, with newfound confidence, hoping his voice doesn't sound as fucked-out as he hears. Dream grunts, shucking off his shirt, and shoves a leg between George's, rocking into him achingly slow as he continues marking his king, hands and lips traveling gracefully, methodically, painfully. George's hands grasp at anything, anything his knight will give him, the strong arms holding him against the wall, the gold-spun hair.

He studies Dream, learns that a sharp tug on the hair at the base of his neck makes him keen, learns that moaning breathily causes him to bite down harder, learns that reaching down to relieve the pressure in his pants causes the knight to grab his arm harshly, pinning it to the wall.

George studies his knight, studies him deeply.

Dream finally breaks away, surveying his handiwork, and a predatorial glint comes to his eye as he watches George heave against the stone wall, completely under the knight's spell. He begins ripping at the king's clothes furiously, fumbling with his shirt then tearing it completely down the front, growling as George looks at him fearfully, bringing his arms up to cover himself.

"Fucking stop, yeah?" Dream says angrily, and George lets his arms fall limply to his sides as Dream surges forward again, pressing him to the wall and peppering open-mouthed kisses to his chest. The king feels a wave of pleasure wash over him as Dream's fingers graze the front of his pants, and he leans into the touch wantonly, silently begging for *more*.

George drops to his knees suddenly, surprising Dream, who stares down at him hungrily.

"Let me worship you," he whispers softly, tugging down Dream's trousers. He throws a glance to the altar beside him, sending a silent prayer to the heavens for forgiveness, and begins stroking Dream, causing the knight to throw his head back in pleasure, moaning brokenly.

George licks tentatively, watching Dream's features contort, then takes him in entirely, hollowing out his cheeks like he's seen Katerina do hundreds of times, swirling his tongue slowly, teasingly,

causing Dream to gasp and buck his hips. The king lets his knight grasp at his hair and fuck his mouth harshly until tears spring from his eyes, spilling onto his cheeks. Dream's hips stutter, and George pulls off with an obscene sucking sound, falling back to steady himself on the wall.

"Dream, please," he begs, mouth slightly open, praying that his knight will understand. "Please."

Dream nods, lowering them to the floor. He sits on the plush rug near the altar, propped up against the wall, and George rids himself of his trousers, crawling between the knight's muscular legs, straddling him. Dream brings his fingers to George's mouth, tracing his spit-slick lips with wonder before pushing them in. George sucks obediently, never breaking eye contact as the knight's other hand travels to his neck, Dream's favorite place to hold his king.

Dream pushes into George harshly, lets him adjust, then adds more fingers, finally easing George down onto himself, curling a hand around his waist. Pleasure rocks through the king, causing him to whine, and the harsh fingers around his neck tighten as the knight sets an unforgiving pace, fucking into George with his eyes screwed shut. George throws his head back, feeling the shockwaves roll through his system, then surges forward, clawing at Dream's broad shoulders, feeling the scars ripple under his fingers.

"Look at me," George whispers into his ear.

Dream's eyes fly open, and they press their sweat-slick foreheads together, chasing the high, the release. The abbey's silent save for the sound of Dream's low moans and George's needy gasps. The sun's beginning to shift in the sky, changing the colored shadows that fall across the stone walls. George watches in awe as Dream's face becomes stained blue, red, then green, every thrust causing his skin to adopt a different hue.

Dream fucks George mercilessly, savoring the sounds tumbling from his lips as he bites down on the king's shoulder, causing him to cry out in pain.

"Say my name," he murmurs as George sucks a bruise at the base of his neck.

"No," George breathes, whining softly.

"Say my fucking name, George," Dream responds, tightening his grip. "Say my name or I'll fucking destroy you."

*I wouldn't mind that,* George thinks.

"Dream," George whispers. "Dream, Dream, please."

"That's not my name, fuck, fuck you," Dream spits. "It's Clay. Say my name, George."

George's eyes widen as Dream fucks into him just right, head falling back as he moans, "*Clay, Clay, Clay, oh God, right there, please.*"

The thrusts weaken—Dream's hands painfully find George's waist, clamping down as he moans against the king's shoulder, releasing himself. With a few tugs from Dream, George is gone, gripping the knight's scarred back as he rides it out, near tears as the haze begins to settle.

*These are mine,* George thinks, running his hands down the mottled flesh.

They stare at each other, George's hands scratching at Dream's scalp the way he likes, and then it's over—the knight heaves his king off with a grunt, avoiding George's gaze and snatching his discarded garments, dressing quickly, fastening the mask, and stalking away.



George fumbles to put his clothes on, the aching in his body spreading to consume his heart, his mind, his soul. He eases on the ripped shirt, buttons his coat, pulls on his trousers and shoes. Once the knight's footsteps have faded, the king kneels at the altar, places his head in his hands, and sobs, attached to nothing, connected to everything.

## Chapter End Notes

uhhhh hello

inspiration for the abbey is st. giles cathedral in edinburgh, it's very beautiful and the interior is stunning

hope you all enjoyed lol i've never written seggs before this fic so pls be gentle :')

playlist: <https://open.spotify.com/playlist/34nRL5AY2mcoHpG1PDhdoA?si=srRAj93TTIKxkRM3ds77xg>

i chose so long forever and take me to church as the songs for this chapter. i think take me to church is pretty self-explanatory ;)

love from the loglady <3

# Eleven

## Chapter Summary

TW for sexual content in this chapter

## Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for [notes](#)

George wakes before dawn on his wedding day, a quiet chill settling over the bedchamber as he watches Katerina's chest rise and fall. The satin sleeve of her nightgown tickles his arm, and he jerks away involuntarily as she shifts towards him, sighing softly in her sleep. George squeezes his eyes shut, willing himself to go back to sleep, but the persisting ache that spreads throughout his muscles is impossible to ignore. It's been three days since his confession, and Dream is nowhere to be found, the knight's training paused for the sake of wedding preparations. The king fiddles with the corner of his bedsheet and brings his hand up to scratch at his neck, grazing one of the fading bruises. He gasps softly at the sudden pain, then presses down harder, causing thrilling fire to spread throughout his body.

*I want it to hurt. Hurt me. Hurt me,* he'd whispered in Dream's ear. *Make it hurt, I know you can.*

Katerina noticed at afternoon tea, when George stumbled in an hour late, hair ruffled and eyes red from crying. He muttered out some story about falling out of the carriage, but she studied the evidence of his sins with a knowing look, choosing to smile blankly and accept the excuse.

She wakes an agonizing hour later, rolling onto George the way she did every morning and tickling his sides. They laugh at each other and she smacks him with a pillow, looking like an angel bathed in the gentle morning sunlight. *Maybe in another life, I could have loved you.* They dress hurriedly, and she's out the door to get fitted into her gown while George takes breakfast with a tired-looking Will, who ruffles his hair and pulls him into a crushing hug.

"Wedding day, my boy!"

"Sure is," George mumbles through bites of bread. Church bells start to ring in the distance, sending a chill through his spine.

"Nervous?" Will asks, taking a sip of tea. "I happened to walk past the room where all the bridesmaids were getting dressed," he chuckles, "looked like an absolute madhouse."

"Isn't Nathalie a bridesmaid?"

"Precisely," Will replies, causing them to dissolve into giggles.

The servants arrive, knocking gently on the wooden door and stepping in with his garments. They set the polished crown down on the table, supported by a velvet pillow, and George traces his hands over the jewels, sighing deeply. They dress him hurriedly, scrambling around with a nervous buzz, as if his pants being slightly wrinkled would surely cause the downfall of humanity. Will leaves to get ready, returning quickly in his finery, grinning despite his pallid complexion and sunken eyes. Nathalie arrives shortly after in an emerald green gown, waltzing around George's

dressing room with Will as the finishing touches are put on the king's outfit. George catches a glimpse of himself in the mirror and barely recognizes the man before him—shuddering as he sees his father's eyes stare back—sees his brother's eyes stare back. Guilt wraps a cold fist around the king's heart as he realizes James would never have a wedding day, never see Will as his best man, never cement his love, his *true love*, in the eyes of God.

George steps into the gilded carriage amongst crowds of cheering subjects lining the path from the palace to the abbey, casting a last look back at the castle before the driver clicks his tongue and the horses set off. He watches as Cook wipes a tear from her eye, smiling brightly as her children chase after the carriage, giggling happily. As George approaches the abbey, he sees the wedding party. His mouth goes dry as Nicholas, Karl, and Will shuffle into the church, laughing joyously and waving to guests. Nathalie and the bridesmaids congregate outside the abbey to socialize, white ribbons braided into their hair, holding obscenely large bouquets. George watches with a small smile as they maneuver their way around screaming flower girls in puffy white dresses, trying to enforce a semblance of order amongst the chaos. George walks inside, through the back wings of the Abbey, and takes his place at the altar, groomsmen stationed to the side, knights lining the walls decorated with elegant white bouquets and flickering candles. Will stands just behind him, and the familiar closeness allows George's heartbeat to settle as the archbishop takes his position. Guests meander in and take their places, the massive abbey overflowing with distant family members and various aristocrats nearly falling out of their seats to get a glimpse of the queen-to-be. The king scans the crowd for Dream, but the masked knight is nowhere to be seen. George grows nauseated with every passing second, hearing nothing but his heart pounding in his ears and the choir belting "*hallelujah, hallelujah.*" The king winces as he feels his stomach drop with anxiety, limbs practically buzzing with nervous tension. *Where is he, where is he, where is he*, thrums inside George's brain, and he *aches*, aches for just a glimpse of his knight. He gazes up at the massive altar before him and shuffles his feet on the red carpet rolled out beneath him, inhaling sharply as the archbishop, dressed in white robes, casts him a suspicious look. Clergymen surround the archbishop, holding various crucifixes and other idolatry, murmuring softly to each other as the overwhelming swell of music drowns out all other forms of noise. George shudders as he watches a priest emerge from behind the altar, thinking back to his confession.

*More, more, Dream. Own me, mark me. Please, more,* he'd begged.

*Take me, take it all, take it all, George,* Dream had whispered into his skin.

Finally, the doors shudder open and Katerina appears, a burst of sunlight streaming out from behind her, looking beautiful as the heavens with cream-colored lace and golden accents adorning her gown, hair plaited intricately and woven with flowers and gold twine, jewels draped around her delicate neck. The bridesmaids follow, carrying the monstrous veil, and she grasps onto her father's arm tightly, beaming brightly as she meets George's gaze. He offers her nothing but a soft smile, the one he adopts when he can't bring himself to hurt her feelings. The music grows louder, and George feels it in her bones, head spinning as he smells the sickly sweet cloud of perfume nearing him. *It's too much.* Albert deposits her at the altar and casts a dangerous look towards George, a look that screams "*don't fuck this up.*" George glances at Karl, who smiles at him innocently before nudging Nicholas, whispering something in the knight's ear. A poisonous unease bubbles in George's stomach. He turns toward Katerina, her soft features clouding with anxiety as the Archbishop begins to speak. Katerina's head wobbles slightly under the weight of the massive tiara, and she swallows harshly, casting her eyes downward. He wishes he could reassure her, pull a silly face to calm her nerves, reach out and brush their hands together, a soft reminder of his presence.

He wishes he could love her.

He wishes he was a better man.

“Dearly beloved,” the archbishop booms, “we are gathered here today in the eyes of God and in the faith of this congregation, to join together this man and this woman in holy matrimony,”

George straightens his posture as Katerina looks up at him through darkened lashes. She exhales shakily, gripping her massive bouquet until the stems of the white roses delicately snap. Realizing her error, the princess hastily hands the bouquet to Nathalie, blushing furiously. Will shifts his head minutely, glancing at Nathalie, and they share a secretive smile until Will turns away, flushing at the thought of his love being given away in a white dress.

“Who giveth this woman to be married to this man?” the archbishop continues.

Albert steps forward, grinning widely at George. “I do,” he rasps out, bringing his daughter’s hands to meet the king’s, stepping back as they connect. Katerina and George hold each other tightly, and George expects electricity to crackle between them, expects some sort of heavenly sign, some sign telling him this is *right*.

Nothing extraordinary happens—they’re just two people holding on for dear life.

“I, *George Henry Windsor*,” the archbishop starts.

“I, George Henry Windsor.”

“*Take thee, Katerina Eden Mary, to be my wedded wife.*”

“Take thee, Katerina Eden Mary, t-to be my wedded wife,” he chokes out, noticing the way her eyes flutter shut as he speaks.

“*To have and to hold, from this day forward, for better, for worse, for richer, for poorer, in sickness and in health. To love and to cherish according to the Lord’s holy ordinance.*”

“To have and to hold, from this day forward, for better, for worse, for richer, for poorer, in sickness and in health,” he pauses, scanning the crowd briefly. *Where is he, where is he, where is he.* “To love and to cherish according to the Lord's holy ordinance.”

“I, *Katerina Eden Mary.*”

“I, Katerina Eden Mary,” she says, softly, shakily.

“*Take thee, George Henry Windsor, to be my wedded husband*”

“Take thee, George Henry Windsor, to be my wedded husband.”

“*To have and to hold, from this day forward, for better, for worse, for richer, for poorer, in sickness and in health. To love, to cherish, and to obey according to the Lord’s holy ordinance.*”

“To have and to hold, from this day forward, for better, for worse, for richer, for poorer, in sickness and in health. To love, to cherish, and to obey according to the Lord’s holy ordinance,” she whispers, big blue eyes welling with tears as George’s heart races. *Obey?*

“*Till death us do part.*”

“Till death us do part,” she finishes, exhaling softly.

"Are you prepared, as you follow the path of marriage, to love and honor each other for as long as

you both shall live?"

"I am," Katerina says hurriedly, gazing down at their interlocked hands.

"I am," George murmurs.

"Receive these rings as a sign of love and fidelity, in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit," the archbishop says, and Will steps forward, placing the gold wedding bands onto the bible placed in the priest's hand. They comply, slipping the rings onto each other's fingers, and George catches Katerina's hands before she pulls away, gripping tightly. She smiles at him, ducking her head slightly and looking up as if he'd hung the stars.

"Long live King George and Queen Katerina!" he declares, and the crowd's murmurs turn to a deafening roar as the choir resumes their song. George feels like he's no longer inhabiting his own body, feels like he's floating around the abbey, watching himself become a husband, watching himself cement his future, locking lives with a woman he barely knows.

The rest of the wedding rushes by. George misses his father once, his mother twice, James the entire time. The newlyweds walk arm in arm to the courtyard of the abbey, looking out at the crowds that gathered for them amidst the light dusting of snow. Women cry openly, calling out to their new queen. It seems as if it's the happiest day of everyone's life.

Everyone except George.

A dark, creeping feeling inhabits him, a feeling that leaves him fearful and breathless. Every time the king gazes down at his queen, he can't help but physically recoil.

*There's nothing wrong with her. It's me. It's me. I'm broken. Please, God, make me love her,* he'd prayed as they walked further through the courtyard, greeting guests. After a hearty dinner and alcohol-fueled celebration with Nathalie, Will, Karl, and Nicholas, the newlyweds stumble up the staircase to their bedchamber, falling over drunk and giggling with childish glee. George practically rips the dress from her as they crash-land onto the soft mattress, the orange glow of candlelight dancing off Katerina's skin as he makes love to her, slowly, sweetly, as if the slightest movement would cause her to break. Even while drunk, it's a practiced rhythm—George goes through the motions methodically. He knows where to kiss, to suck, to press. Knows exactly how to move in order to detach completely, allowing his mind to drift elsewhere while his body does the work.

When he releases into her, shuddering and groaning, George thinks of Dream's strong arms grasping at his waist, the calloused fingers wrapping around his neck, the golden hair tickling his cheek as the knight moaned brokenly into his shoulder. He thinks of the way their bodies fit together, the way he hurts Dream and gets hurt right back, the way Dream takes his time, savoring every sob, every moan, every gasp. Katerina falls asleep quickly, like she always does, smiling softly and kissing George's shoulder before wrapping her arms around him. He lays awake, like he always does, feeling disgusted, claustrophobic in a massive room, wishing he could disappear into thin air.

It's two in the morning when George finally disentangles himself from Katerina's sleepy embrace, wrapping a cloak around his nightclothes. Making his way to the grand staircase, George feels the familiar guilt seep throughout his body as his eyes flit back and forth between the climb back to safety—to his wife—and the climb to the stone tower. The castle buzzes with dark mystery, and George curses how his home feels foreign, curses how even his own body feels foreign.

He casts a glance out the grand foyer window, watching snow fall torrentially to the earth, wincing as a massive tree falls in front of the palace gate. *That'll be a bitch to fix.* George drums his hand

on the banister hesitantly, his pounding heart and aching mind tearing his body in two. *Make a decision, George. What kind of man are you?*

*I'm weak.*

He begins climbing towards the stone tower, looking over his shoulder every so often, pulling the cloak tighter. *I'm sneaking around in my own home.* He reaches the wooden door and presses his hand to the dark oak, giving himself a moment of peace. There's a soft light glowing from under the door, and he knocks sharply after taking a deep breath.

The door swings open.

Dream's holding a bottle of liquor, looking like death. George cranes his neck to survey the scene behind his knight, shattered glass decorating the stone floor, papers strewn everywhere, frantic scribbles bleeding into the yellowed parchment.

"Why the fuck are you wearing a cloak inside?"

"You're not wearing your mask," he replies, raising his eyebrows.

"You think I sleep with the mask on?"

"God, fuck you," George mutters, throwing his arms around Dream's neck, kissing him deeply, angrily, desperately. The knight's tongue tastes like mint and bitter alcohol but George doesn't care, sucking at Dream's chapped lips with passionate urgency. *More, more, more, I need more.*

Dream stumbles backward, then slams the door shut, ripping at George's clothes like a man possessed.

"Did you- ah- come to the wedding? I didn't see you." George breathes as Dream snaps the clasp of his cloak in half.

"The food was wonderful," Dream responds, tugging George's hair back to expose the column of his throat. "Really quite delicious. I met a bridesmaid, Claire, think your wife will put in a good word?" he continues, sucking at the soft skin between words.

"I'll speak to her about it," George says, gasping as Dream's fingers press bruises into his hip bones.

"Cheers," Dream growls, pulling impatiently at George's clothes.

"Christ, give me a second," George mutters, ridding himself of his shirt.

Dream manhandles him to the bed, throwing his own nightclothes off and depositing George onto the hard mattress.

"I'll get you a better mattress," George says suddenly.

"Do you ever shut the fuck up?" Dream replies, licking at a bruise.

"Fuck you."

George revels in the way Dream's body encompasses him, feeling a shock of pleasure flutter in his stomach as he realizes just how *big* the knight is, all long limbs and lean muscle. Dream memorizes his king with desperate haste, softly running his lips over the angle of George's collarbone.

George's attempts to remove his trousers are interrupted by strong hands gripping his thighs. He trembles at the pressure, reaching out to run his hands across Dream's stomach in dazed wonder.

"Stop fucking squirming," Dream growls, "I'm taking my time with you."

The knight peels George's pants off, sucking at the sensitive skin of his inner thighs. He opens George up with spit-slick fingers, painfully slow, driving loud moans to tumble from the king's lips. Dream kisses away the hisses of pain, holding George to his body protectively. *Hurt me*, George thinks. *Hurt me*. Perfectly on cue, Dream bottoms out into him, causing George to cry out, wrapping his legs around his knight. They look at each other expectantly, and Dream starts to move.

"Please," George rasps, "hands. Hands."

"Beg for them," Dream says wickedly.

George swallows the angry retort as Dream slams into him again, seeing stars in the corners of his vision. *"Clay, Clay. Give me your hands. Put your hands around my neck. Please, Clay. Please, I'll do anything. God, yes. Press down harder. Clay, please harder."*

When it's all over, Dream pulls himself off George, wrapping a sheet around his lower half. "Go," he mutters, picking up the bottle. George blinks at him, leaning against the headboard, panting. "Go, George," Dream says, louder. George stays put, fidgeting with the heavy blanket. "Your highness, don't you fucking know when you're not wanted? Go!" Dream yells, taking a swig of whiskey. George rolls his eyes and begins pulling on his clothes, avoiding eye contact as unease begins crawling into his stomach.

It's nearly dawn when the king returns to his bedchamber, dark bruises scattered across his body. Hours later, he wakes to his wife's embrace.

"Good morning, husband," she whispers.

"Good morning," George replies sleepily, reaching out to stroke her hair robotically.

Katerina rises from the bed, walking towards her dressing table.

"Kate," George calls.

"Hmm?"

"My- er- friend wanted to meet Claire again," he says, rubbing a hand over his eyes.

"Who's Claire, love?"

"One of your bridesmaids."

"I don't know anyone named Claire," she laughs breathily, "are you sure your friend got the right name?"

## Chapter End Notes

hope you're all doing well and aren't too frustrated with george's antics. let me know what you guys think of this chapter!

(hi a + o :))

playlist: <https://open.spotify.com/playlist/34nRL5AY2mcoHpG1PDhdoA?si=tRwnfpvaQoKB9DAn2fFfSw>

love you all! thank you for all the support on the last chapter and my work in general. i really really appreciate it :)

love from the loglady <3



# Come Talk To Me

## Chapter Summary

TW for sexual content in this chapter

## Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for [notes](#)

They pretend it doesn't exist.

They pretend like every time their eyes meet, Dream doesn't shift with the strange mixture of anger and arousal he's reserved only for George.

They pretend like George doesn't purposefully make snarky comments during court, just to rile Dream up.

They pretend like Dream doesn't subtly run the point of his sword down George's leg every time they're sitting opposite in a carriage.

They pretend like George doesn't time his walks to ensure he happens upon the knights' training.

They pretend like Dream's fading bruises are from sparring with Nicholas.

They pretend like George doesn't look lifeless next to Katerina, who settles into her role beautifully, illuminating every room she walks into.

The king is unable to receive guests, unable to think, to move, to speak, without being bombarded with praises for his new queen. He's unable to live without the constant reminder of her excellence. It cuts him, deeply. It drives a dagger into his bruised ego and twists the blade.

*She's a goddess—wicked smart and hilariously witty, too. The children love her. Goodness, when are you planning on children? She's a little young, better wait a year. How will you decorate the nursery? You're a very lucky man, your highness.*

*I fucking know*, George thinks, growing increasingly restless with every passing day. He knows it's wrong, knows the anger is misplaced, but every time her eyes meet his, he wants to curl into himself and vanish into thin air.

The advisers congratulated George heartily after the wedding, lauding his success in securing half of Elytron under Windsor rule. It felt like anything but a victory.

A week passes after the wedding, and he's made no trips up to the stone tower. George praises himself internally for his self-control, even though his hands shake and his mouth goes dry every time he and Katerina pass Dream posted outside their bedchamber. She smiles at George innocently, lovingly, and in those moments, he feels the dark fist of guilt close around his heart. Those are the days he makes love to her, softly, gently, after the palace is asleep. George wonders if she knows the fading bruises that adorn his chest aren't hers, wonders if she knows he closes his eyes and thinks of furious scratches and dirty whispers, angry thrusts and sharp teeth.

Dream despises George with a newfound fire every time Will stumbles into his daily meeting with the knight, a feral smile crossing the private secretary's sunken features. He looks horrible, practically dilapidated, almost as wrecked as *Dream*, but they ignore it, pretending it's a non-issue as they pore over books and maps, methodically drawing diagrams and plans. Dream shoves them into a carved wooden box under his bed, locking up any evidence of their sins. They're technically committing treason, but in some moments, it feels like two mates discussing politics over drinks, even though Dream knows the last thing in the world Will is to him is a friend. Every time the candles burn low and they tiredly say their goodbyes, Will's eyes flash with a hunger Dream's never seen in anyone but himself, and the knight has an urge to run to George's bedchamber, grab him by the shoulders, and scream. *Look at how you've destroyed us. Look how you've broken the two people who truly wanted the best for your kingdom. Look how you've left us to go mull over politics and land deeds with your fucking advisers. Look how you've given a place in your court to the man who betrayed your father. Look at your mistakes. Take accountability. We've all had to do it.*

They pretend it doesn't exist.

George and Katerina aren't an explosion, per se, they're a gradual crumble punctuated by blasts of dynamite. The king knows that for the sake of his country and his queen, the aching desire playing puppetmaster in his mind must be controlled, quelled, *stopped* at any cost. It makes him painful to be around. It makes him lash out at Will in court. It makes him a machine. It drives the stake of unfeeling neutrality deeper and deeper into his heart.

It's a bitingly cold night—they've just come in from sledding with Karl, and George decides he's had enough, had enough of the separation, the pointed stares, the blistering wildfire that singes his nerve endings and leaves monstrous destruction in its wake. He flees to the library under the guise of meeting Will, and ends up drinking alone, wallowing in self-hatred, resolving to climb up to the tower after he finishes his drink. He's on his third glass of whiskey when the door groans open.

"Hello?" he calls.

"George," a low voice taunts.

"Stop," he says harshly. "What do you want, Dream?"

"What do *you* want, George?"

George feels his stomach flutter. "Pardon?"

Dream ambles into the light, pulling the mask from his face. *This never gets old*, George thinks, as candlelight turns the knight's eyes translucent.

"I saw you sledding," he laughs. "You looked ridiculous."

"Thanks," George mutters, "why are you here?"

"So impatient," Dream giggles, and George feels a jolt of annoyance run through him. "I've been speaking to Will," Dream continues, dropping to his knees in between the king's spread legs. George pales.

"Oh, that's nice," he mumbles out, watching as Dream stares up at him expectantly.

"Yes, yes it is quite nice," Dream grins, bringing a scarred hand to encircle George's thigh, causing the king to flinch. "We've been talking about how," he pauses, moving his hand upwards, "we're going to get back the rest of Elytron."

“We- we aren’t concerned about that, Dream. It’s not an issue we can debate,” George says stiffly, eyes tracking the long fingers creeping up his leg.

“Hmm?” Dream smiles softly, ghosting his lips over George’s. The king turns his head to the side, closing his eyes.

“I said,” George huffs, “I promised Albert we wouldn’t try and take the rest.”

“Promises can be broken, George. Vows can be broken. Look at you, for example,” Dream says, bringing his lips to George’s ear. “You break your vows so I can break you.”

George whimpers softly. “Stop,” he whispers. “Stop. We have starving citizens to take care of. Farms are doing badly because of the, ah!” he gasps as Dream licks his ear dirtily. “The chill,” George finishes, feeling his pants tighten.

“And I’m sure you know the re-integration of the rest of Elytron would stimulate the economy,” Dream whispers, gripping George’s thighs bruisingly.

“Dream, stop,” George begs, leaning into the knight, inhaling alcohol and mint. “I can’t.”

“No, you can’t,” Dream chuckles. “But I can.”

He surges forward, capturing George’s lips painfully, teeth nipping harshly at the pink skin. George keens, wrapping his arms around the knight’s neck, exploring his broad shoulders with desperation. George grabs at Dream’s face, pushing his index finger sharply into the angle of the knight’s jaw, gasping into the kiss, begging for more.

Dream stands suddenly, breaking their embrace, and looks down at George, saliva dripping down the side of his mouth, eyes glowing expectantly.

George takes a deep breath, wiping away the taste of Dream from his lips.

“Get on your knees.”

George scrambles to the floor, so starved he doesn’t even bother with a witty comeback, pulling at Dream’s pants hungrily.

“You just can’t wait, can you?” Dream says breathily. “You’re so desperate, your highness. Did I ever tell you that?”

George nods, feeling all thoughts drain out through his ears except *Dream, Dream, Dream*.

“Do it then,” Dream whispers, “and do it well. I want to see myself fucking moving in your throat.”

Heat explodes in George’s stomach, and he surges forward, tugging Dream’s pants down, replicating exactly what he did to make the knight moan brokenly that day in the abbey.

It’s dirty. It’s sloppy and painful. George nearly cries at the overwhelming feeling. He moans around Dream and it makes the knight grip a bookshelf like it’ll save him. It’s angry. It’s Dream pounding his frustrations into George, who happily receives him, not lovingly, but with an intensity he’s unwilling to show anyone else. His knees burn and he groans uncomfortably around Dream, which just spurs the knight to go harder. George doesn’t mind.

Dream grips his hair so hard George swears he’s going to pull some out. He doesn’t mind.

Dream says filthy things, calling George every name under the sun. He doesn’t mind.

Dream releases into the king's open mouth, pulling out at the last minute so George's face gets painted. He doesn't mind.

He kisses George with torment, with longing. With undying lust.

He pushes George into the red armchair, kneeling between his legs once again.

He takes George's pants off slowly, kisses dark bruises down his chest and around his neck. George throws his head back, staring at the wooden beams, thinking about how it would feel if the ceiling caved in. They'd probably keep going.

George gets Dream's hands without any begging. He takes George into his mouth gently, presses his nose to the skin on George's stomach, lets himself gag. It's horrible and it's beautiful and it's shameful and it's fucking incredible. George loses himself in no time, and Dream collapses into the armchair opposite him, straightening his clothes. George wants to die.

No, he doesn't.

Dream drums his fingers on the table beside him while George catches his breath, scrubbing his hand across his face dramatically, wiping at his sticky skin with a grimace, causing the knight to laugh softly.

"I'm going to tell the armies tomorrow."

"No, you can't," George says, embarrassed at how raspy his voice is compared to Dream's.

"Can you let me do my job for once?" Dream hisses, turning red. "Is it possible for you to trust me for one fucking minute?"

The dam breaks.

"YOU AREN'T THE KING!" George screams. "You lost your chance at being a king. You don't get to tell me how to rule *my* kingdom."

"I do," Dream growls, "I do get to tell you when you're fucking everything up. When was the last time you spoke to Will? Have you seen your *best friend* recently?"

George stands, turning to escape, but Dream's on his feet in a millisecond, catching George's forearm, dragging the king in so they're barely an inch apart. "Let go of me," George hisses.

"Only if you let me attack, your highness," Dream snarls, nails digging red crescents into George's skin.

"I said no," George breathes, "that's your final fucking answer. Continue this madness and I'll have both you *and* Will hung for treason. I'm sticking with Albert, sticking with my advisers. They know how to run a kingdom."

"Icarus," Dream spits.

"Excuse me?"

"You are flying much too close to the sun," he whispers, "and I will *not* be here to save you when your wings burn."

George wrenches his arm away. "Fuck you," he mutters. "Whatever this is, whatever sick fantasy you're playing out with me, I'm done. I'm fucking done."

“Good,” Dream scoffs, “I was getting sick of your pansy-ass anyway. Go run to your *wife*.”

George punches him. Hard. Dream stumbles backward, fingers catching the side of a desk to steady himself. “Get the fuck out,” he says lowly, dangerously, emerald fire blazing in his eyes, “get the fuck out before I do something I *won’t* regret.”

“Try me.”

“I SAID, GET OUT, YOUR HIGHNESS!” Dream roars.

“It’s my library. You don’t get to tell me-”

“God, I don’t fucking trust myself around you anymore,” Dream interrupts.

“What the hell does that mean?”

“It means,” Dream growls, crowding George into a towering bookshelf, “I would kill you if it meant you’d never touch Katerina again. Do you understand? I want to hurt you, I want my hard mattress that you hate so fucking much to curve in the shape of your stupid bony spine, I want you to walk around with the same scars I do, to live with constant, painful reminders of my existence. I *ache* for you, your highness. I want to make you cry, I want to make you scream, I want to make you beg on your knees for mercy. And I think you’d deserve all of it. You parade about like you deserve an ounce of my respect- you- you are *not* a king. Your brother would make a better king than you, and he’s six fucking feet under.”

George feels a match strike in his gut, heart thumping deafeningly.

“Do you know the story behind how royalty came to be?” Dream continues, pressing his forearm to George’s windpipe. “Did they ever teach you?”

George nods, feeling his head go numb.

“Good boy,” Dream taunts, “you’d know then, that you were picked by God. Your family’s blood was picked by God to rule, to govern. You were handpicked by the heavens, your highness, and you’re squandering it. You’re making a mockery of the position you inhabit. Don’t get comfortable,” he spits, “at this rate, it’s not going to be yours for much longer.”

He releases George harshly, “I want to loathe you with my entire fucking being, and most of the time, I do. It’s the times I don’t that terrify me,” Dream says, running a hand through his tangled hair. “Go, your highness. Go, before I fucking snap your neck,” he chokes, holding George’s stare with red-rimmed eyes.

George leaves.

Dream smashes a vase.

Katerina’s sitting stiffly in her nightgown on the corner of the massive four-poster when George returns, looking warily at the dark bruises on his neck.

“Fell out of another carriage?” she huffs, pulling pins out of her hair.

“Something like that,” George mutters, walking to his dressing room.

“George!” the queen exclaims sharply.

"What?" he yells.

"What were you-"

"Katerina, I really don't want to do this right now," George groans, slamming the side of his fist against a wall.

"George," Katerina says, evenly, masking the tremor in her voice. "I am your wife. You cannot dismiss me. Were you really speaking with Will in the library?"

"I'm not dismissing you," he mutters, coming back into view. "I am exhausted and I wish to go to bed. We can talk about this another time."

"No, no, we'll discuss it now. I know- I know that royal marriages are- *loose*, for lack of a better term," she says, eyes welling with tears as she smooths down the corner of their bedsheet. "I can choose, like my mother, and her mother before her, to look the other way. I can do it, if that is what you require of me."

George pulls his shirt over his head, advancing towards her.

"I-"

"It's my turn to speak, George," she says, looking up at him shakily. "I cannot- I cannot discern what it is that you find so repulsive, but I'm asking you to tell me, so that I may at least have a chance to fix it. I will not sit here like a blithering idiot, begging you to love me. I won't do it."

"Nothing's wrong with you, Kate," he rushes, wanting to reach out to her. His hands stick to his sides like glue, and George pales when a tear spills out of his queen's eye.

"There has to be, George. There's no other explanation for this. I- I'm doing everything you ask of me. I'm greeting guests, I'm being welcoming. I'm smiling, I'm laughing, I'm putting on a damn show," she whispers. "Tell me where I'm falling short, and I'll amend my errors."

"You're not falling short, you're not, I promise."

"Then explain why you're sleeping next to your wife while marked by another woman."

George curses himself for the sigh of relief that escapes his lips. She blinks. "Is this funny to you, George?"

"No!" he exclaims, "it's not-"

"I love you," she whispers, another tear making a mark on her white nightgown.

"So do I!" George yells defensively.

"Then say it. Tell me you love me."

"Katerina, this is-"

"TELL ME YOU LOVE ME!" she screams, burying her face in her hands. "God, tell me you love me." George flinches, stepping back. "Sorry, I'm sorry," she mumbles quietly, "I'm acting hysterical. I apologize."

"I just- I injured myself. I got in an argument with one of my knights," he explains gently, gripping a dresser to steady himself.

"I know that isn't true, George," she counters, furiously wiping at her cheek.

"It is!" he exclaims, "God, what do you want from me?"

"I- I want everything," she cries, "I want in sickness and in health, for better, for worse... for richer, for poorer. I want a love the heavens would envy. I want everything with you. Can you look me in the eye and say the same for yourself? Can you?"

George swallows.

"That's what I thought," Katerina spits coldly. She shifts, peeling back the heavy blankets and settling under the covers. The queen meets her husband's gaze again, then leans over to snuff the candles out, leaving George in darkness.

## Chapter End Notes

hi my loves!!

i hope you liked this chapter, sorry if it's a bit dialogue-heavy. i finished the outline for the fic today, it's looking like it'll be around 30 chapters. hope you guys can stick around for that long :)

will and dream are my new favorite dynamic duo btw :D

if you're back to school this week, i'm sending all my love and motivation to you! you got this! thankfully my college doesn't start until february so i have some time to relax and hopefully crank out some good chapters.

also some nerdy facts about the de profundis prayer: it's usually used before confession to represent sorrow. i definitely took a lot of creative liberty when i made them recite it at funerals, but i think it's interesting how the characters in this story use it, almost as if it's a final confession.

i'm also in the process of making playlists for individual characters since some of you told me you were interested in that. i'll keep you all updated!

let me know what you guys think in the comments! i'm still catching up but i promise i'll respond :) thank you all so so so much for the support. i've seen people talking about my fic on twitter and it's slightly unfathomable but also really exciting.

okay, i'll stop rambling now :)

playlist: <https://open.spotify.com/playlist/34nRL5AY2mcoHpG1PDhdoA?si=mFA8qLVIT9eialxNvjSNjQ>

love from the loglady <3

# Silk

## Chapter Summary

hi so there's a slight tw for implied self-harm and a bit of blood. it's not too explicitly stated, but if this triggers you in any way please don't read this chapter. love you <3

## Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for [notes](#)

It gets worse.

Will looks halfway to the grave, stuttering out apologies and excuses every time he stumbles into court uncharacteristically late. Nathalie's graduated from worried looks to worried conversations. *Will, this isn't healthy. Will, you're up too late. Will, can't you skip your meeting with Dream today? Will, talk to George. Will, please eat. Will, I love you.*

Dream drinks, and drinks and drinks and drinks. He retreats into darkness and doesn't come out. He speaks to Will every night, by dying firelight. They conspire with a few generals over whiskey. They commit treason. He trains his knights, scheduling their sessions during court so George won't walk by. Nicholas is his friend. It's his first friend, his only friend. Somehow, he feels more alone than ever. He's going through women faster than anyone cares to notice, feeling a twinge of guilt when he looks down, realizing it isn't his king. His Icarus.

George tries to fall in love with Katerina, tries to love the subtle curve of her spine, tries to love her long hair, silken and gleaming in the moonlight, tries to love her pink lips and rosy cheeks and sparkling eyes and gentle smile. It doesn't work. He meets with his new citizens, asks them how they're faring, asks them what they need, tries to be a good king. He feels numb. Pain is better than numb, he decides. He sits in the bath, scrubbing his hands until they bleed. He feels even more numb than before, watching drops of blood twist through the clear water.

*I ache for you, your highness.*

*I ache for you, too,* he wants to scream. No sound comes out.

Nicholas appears at his door at the beginning of December, knocking ever-so-softly. George almost doesn't hear it.

"George?" Nicholas calls, tousled hair falling into his warm eyes. He shifts uncomfortably, but wears the same childish grin he had when they played as children. He stumbled in Will and George's footsteps, always one step behind, always painfully excluded. George recalls the time when he was ten and Nicholas five, and the latter fell and split his forehead open on some rocks, remembers how Will carried him in strong arms back to the castle, remembers how they huddled around Nicholas sleeping peacefully in bed, cheeks red and swollen from crying.

He remembers creeping around the cellar with them, remembers finding a twitching mouse in a trap, and carefully extracting it, shoving it in Nicholas' face as Will howled with laughter. Nicholas took one look at the rodent and burst into tears, sprinting from the darkened cellar as George and Will collapsed on the damp stone floors, giggling until their sides ached.



Worst of all, he remembers the look on Nicholas' face the day James died. The look of debilitating sadness. Of betrayal. Of soul-crushing, heart-wrenching, mind-shattering *loss*.

"Nicholas, hello, come in," George says softly. "It's been too long."

"Yes, training's keeping me quite busy," he says proudly, walking toward where the king's seated on an armchair. Nicholas stares down at George expectantly, and a tense, awkward silence fills the vast bedchamber. George swallows, averting his gaze.

It was never like this before. Nicholas was his younger brother. Then again, George was never good at keeping his brothers.

The king shivers. "Ah, I see. And how is Karl?"

Nicholas beams, dropping into an armchair across from George, chuckling lightly. "He is well. It's nice to have a Will, y'know."

"Hmm?" George hums.

"Ah, don't you remember when we were younger? It was you and Will against the world. I always felt left out, rightfully so, I am five years younger. But it was more than just the age... It was an unspoken connection. I think I have that with Karl. It's wonderful, really. I'm glad you introduced us."

"That's good to hear, Nicky," George says with a small smile.

"It is," Nicholas replies, "how have you been? I haven't seen you watch our training for some time."

"Oh, just busy, you know with Elytron and all. Integrating land."

"Yes, of course," Nicholas laughs. "I can't even pretend I understand that whole ordeal."

"It's just, er, difficult sometimes. Getting Albert and the advisers to comply. Cost of being a young king, I'm sure," George coughs, attempting to keep his features impassive.

"Oh, absolutely, George. It's hard when you're young, I mean, I never thought I was cut out for knighthood," Nicholas says, smile faltering, "it scares me, you know, war and all that. Not the general concept of it, but the killing. Karl helps. I go to my quarters after training and we talk and drink and go out. It's wonderful, really," he muses. "Sometimes I try to speak to Dream about this, and he's an incredible leader, incredible friend, too. But he doesn't understand. It's not the same. I suppose it comes naturally to some."

George stands and pours healthy portions of whiskey for them, handing one to Nicholas. "It's lovely that you're speaking to Karl," he mutters, head spinning. "Nicholas, I have to ask, where is this coming from? The war talk?" George asks hesitantly.

"I-I'm not sure," he replies, gripping the glass firmly and stumbling over his words. "Just an observation about- er- Dream and being a knight and all, I suppose," he mutters.

"And how is Dream?" George inquires, feeling his heart pound, "How is he faring?"

"Dream's excellent, George. You did good in picking him," Nicholas says carefully, averting his eyes and taking a cautious sip.

“Well, Karl is going to be joining us in Balmoral for Christmas. Will and Nathalie are planning to come, too. You’re more than welcome to join,” George says, feeling a strange unease flood through his system.

“Of course, I’d love that,” Nicholas replies softly, downing the rest of his drink. He sets the glass down roughly, eyes darting around the room. “George-”

“Did you, uh, did you need to speak to me about something in particular?” the king interrupts accidentally, cringing at the hurt expression flashing across the knight’s features.

Nicholas gives him a strange look. “Yes, actually. I don’t want to burden you. Since you became king... What I’m trying to say is, I know I shouldn’t disturb you, really, because you’re busy all the time, and rightfully so. But I- I can’t really talk to Will. I can’t even find him,” he blurts, laughing ruefully.

George nods, running a hand through his hair. “What’s the matter?” he asks, stomach twisting.

Nicholas sighs, running a hand through his hair. He swallows roughly, glances at George, then trains his gaze to the floor. “Dream is conspiring with Will. I don’t know what it is, I don’t know why, but I know for a fact that they’re meeting up, every day,” he says shakily. “Don’t misunderstand, I think Dream is fucking incredible. He’s made your armies strong, George. But I’m telling you this as your friend, as Will’s friend and Dream’s friend. They’re not- they’re not in the right frame of mind.”

“Really?” George huffs, feeling an impossible weight settle over him. “They’re still meeting?”

“Yes,” Nicholas says guiltily. “You knew?”

“I had a suspicion- Nicholas, please promise me you won’t breathe a word of this to anyone. I know what they’re doing, but please, you cannot tell anyone. Not even Karl. Especially not Karl.”

Nicholas nods frantically, leaning forward in the chair. “Are they going to be okay?” he whispers hesitantly.

“I- I don’t know, Nicholas. They’re going against the crown, but I-”

“Don’t punish them,” Nicholas blurts.

“I wasn’t planning on it.”

“Alright,” the knight mumbles. “I’ll get going. Um- sorry if I fucked something up.”

“Of course you didn’t. Thank you for speaking to me.”

“I’ll just show myself out then,” Nicholas breathes, and they both stand hurriedly.

George nods, feeling like the wind’s been knocked out of him. “Come to Balmoral for Christmas, Nicholas!” he calls, hands shaking as he deposits himself back down on the armchair.

“Okay,” Nicholas says, throwing George a smile that barely meets his eyes. George nods again as the door shuts, pressing the heel of his palms into his eyes until shapes dance in his vision.

He walks over to the bureau with writing supplies and hastily pulls out a parchment and ink, prepared to draft a letter to the advisers. *Dream and Sir Gould have taken it upon themselves to take court matters into their own hands. This is a treacherous deed. This is treason. We must see to*

*it that they are punished accordingly-*

George presses too hard on the yellowed parchment, and ink splatters everywhere, bleeding into his fingerprints and staining the carved wood desk. He throws the quill down with a tense rage, feeling hot tears prick in the corners of his eyes. *This is my fault. This is my fault. This is my fault. It's all your fault, George.*

Almost unconsciously, like a puppet on a wire, George begins walking out of the castle with ink-splattered hands, walking through the gates, walking past the guards who cast him a wary look. He walks past the orchards, buried in snow. He walks past Cook's children, rolling in the icy slush. Walks in nothing but a thin shirt and trousers to shield him from the burning cold slicing through the air. Walks until he reaches the abbey, shudders at the towering structure before him. The archbishop eyes George from inside, nodding his head in acknowledgment, somehow casting a temporary spell, quelling the king's pounding heart, giving him a moment of serenity. A moment of quiet. He follows the beaten path behind the abbey to the royal crypt, presses his hand to the cool stone, tracing the moss-infested cracks before he enters, boots quietly echoing against the cobbled floors. George walks past centuries of his blood, buried deep within the earth, shivering slightly at the sordid tranquility. Finally, George reaches his family's plot, averting his eyes at his father's grave, and sits down beside James' tomb with a huff, leaning back against the stone wall. For a moment, he's at peace. For a moment, it feels like another visit with Will. Just for a moment.

*Non est ad astra mollis e terris via*, James' headstone screams at him. Taunts him.

George splays his hands on the ground, stretching his reddened fingers out slowly, allowing the cold to consume him. "Hi James," he whispers, watching a beetle crawl up the opposite wall. "I need help, please," he says, feeling like he's fourteen and asking his brother to assist him with maths. "I don't think I'm being a good king," George continues hesitantly, "Will's in trouble, and I cannot bring myself to enact any form of punishment upon him. He's right. What he's doing is right. I just- I can't admit it. It can't always be me and him against the world." George rubs his hands feverishly together as the chill begins to seep through his veins. The beetle's fallen from the wall, dutifully starting its climb again. "And Dream. I haven't told you about him before, Jamie. He's- er- he's the captain of my guard. He's terrifying. He scares me so much I feel like I can't breathe, and yet, when he doesn't speak to me, I feel as though I will surely die without him. I want to take Elytron back, I want to make father proud, make you proud, but I- I don't think I'm strong enough. I can't just go against rationality, against reason, against the crown, all to prove- to prove myself worthy of this position."

He stares at the pale stone, almost expecting a response.

"They're plotting together, and I can assure you they've made a more coherent military strategy in a few weeks than I've managed to do my entire time as king. And, God, I'd do anything to join them, but I can't tell them that, can I?" George continues, laughing ruefully. "Oh, I also have a wife now. I missed you at the wedding. I miss you in general. She- my wife- she's alright, I suppose. Her name is Katerina, but I- It's not the same as you and Maggie."

George screws his eyes shut as tears leak out the corners. "It's not even been a month, James, and I've been so fucking unfaithful. Physically, yes, but mentally unfaithful. I don't fucking love her, and it's killing me. I wish I could love her, I wish I could kiss her and feel that sweeping rush of happiness you described to me. I wish I could hold her and feel content. I just- I *can't*. I promise I'm trying my best. I promise, Jamie."

"It's all Dream's fault. It's all him. It's always just- *him*. He's everywhere and nowhere. When he wants me to find him, he's there, and it's torturous. When he doesn't—he snatches himself away

from me as some sort of sick punishment. He knows what he's doing, knows I'm unable to fucking resist. And I just play along like some- some- obedient lap dog. I don't know how to say no to him. I just freeze and let him have his way with me—and the worst part is—I fucking *adore* it. My mind's convinced me it's some sort of twisted privilege to writhe under his touch. It- it *is* a privilege."

George scratches at the stone floor, turning it white, feeling powdery residue collect under his blunt nails. "I've never felt like this towards anyone in my entire fucking life," he breathes, "I can't go on... It's not fair to my wife. It's not fair to anyone. I'm fucking killing everyone around me."

He sighs, unwilling to let himself cry. George stands slowly, looking down at the years inscribed on James' headstone. "You had so much of life yet to be lived. You would have been so much better," he whispers, tracing the lettering with a soft finger. "I'm sorry for failing you, time and time again. I'm so sorry, James. I miss you. I miss you every day. I wish I had died instead of you. I wish it was me."

The beetle scuttles past George's foot and he crushes it gently, turning the toe of his boot in a slow, thoughtful motion. "I'll be sorry forever," he mumbles, turning to leave.

George returns to the castle shaking violently, teeth chattering as tear tracks dry to ice on his red skin, shirt damp with melted snow. He enters through the gate, trying to fabricate another tale for his worried queen. She's waiting at the grand doors, a woolen blanket wrapped firmly around her small frame.

"George, George!" Katerina calls worriedly, frantically unwrapping herself and throwing the blanket around him, "what did you do? What happened?"

He gazes at her, feeling his extremities slowly start to regain feeling, "I went for a walk. Got caught in a bit of a blizzard. I'm alright," George states numbly, feeling his stomach churn. She brushes snow out of his hair, a worried expression crossing her features. "I think I have frostbite," he says after a moment.

"God, what's the matter with you? You're not even wearing a cloak."

"I just wanted to feel something," he breathes softly, allowing Katerina to pull him close. He buries her face into her delicate neck, feeling a gentle warmth radiate from her soft skin.

She nods, wiping a stray tear from her cheek. "I'll have someone run you a bath."

George lowers himself into the tub. Sighs as his frozen body turns the steaming water lukewarm. Scrubs his hands until they bleed. Feels nothing. Scrubs harder. Feels nothing.

He peers out the window onto the blanketed castle grounds and wishes he was buried under the snow, wishes he could feel a cold so ruthless it burned him alive. Wishes Dream was here, opposite him, strong muscles rippling under clear water. Wishes he was anyone but himself, wishes he could just vanish without a trace. Wipe himself from everyone's memory.

A bird calls out and George closes his eyes, allowing himself to sink.

hi guys

sorry for the sad chapter. i promise you the next one will be a little better. balmoral castle is the queen of england's residence in scotland, near aberdeenshire, it's really really beautiful up there. that's where george's little found family will be going for christmas in the next chapter. more nicholas content is coming up!

i hope you're all enjoying the story and taking good care of yourselves.

thank you so much for the sweet comments and tweets and dms and everything... i hope you all know how grateful i am that you've decided to read my work. i chose silk and deadwater as songs for this chapter because i really think silk is a beautifully sad depiction of losing faith in everything, love, life, you name it. deadwater is just... agh so heart-wrenching. it's a song about knowing you can do better, knowing you can deserve better, but being unable to act on this knowledge.

let me know what you guys think in the comments!!!

love from the loglady <3

# Gold Rush

## Chapter Summary

### CHRISTMAS :D

## Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for [notes](#)

When George was a child, his family made the arduous carriage ride to Balmoral every Christmas, past Scottish villages enveloped in snow, winding through vast forests and sprawling moors frozen solid. James would point out every sheep along the way, gleefully laughing as a cacophony of farm animals drowned out the rhythmic clicking of horses' hoofs. Queen Anastasia knitted the entire way, producing a lopsided scarf or hat by the time they reached the massive castle, handing it to whichever child caused the least trouble along the journey. George and James would sprint from the carriage the second it stopped outside Balmoral, tumbling into the snow with their cousins, spending their holidays rosy-cheeked and half-frozen, tracking icy slush through the stone hallways. They'd run to the boathouse, tiptoeing around the corners of the frozen loch, daring each other to slide out to the middle. After Will's father passed, he'd come along, too, joining George and James in terrorizing the younger children with stories of giant monsters dwelling in the woods and witches plotting in the dungeons. Cousins were gone now, grown up with families and children in their own castles, and George's family was dead, buried six feet under the restless earth.

There wasn't a year George dreaded the journey, until now. He dreaded the uncomfortable interactions with Nicholas, the unspoken tension with Will, the stiff, barely-convincing displays of affection with Katerina.

Trunks were overstuffed and belted tightly shut, servants hurried around the bedroom frantically packing last-minute odds and ends, and the king and queen of Saudade piled into a carriage with Will, Nathalie, Karl, and Nicholas following behind.

The ride is unusually quiet compared to past years, with Katerina drifting into a fitful sleep after the bumpy roads cause her persistent nausea to worsen. George reaches out hesitantly and strokes her hair, shuddering at dark silk running through his fingers when he much prefers gold-spun waves. He watches deers spring by the carriage, ears twitching with alarm at the approaching horses, watches the farms whiz by, blending together imperceptibly. George grips the small package in the pocket of his cloak, clutching the present for dear life as Balmoral grows nearer. They reach the castle after a few hours of winding paths and frosted moors, local villagers emerging from their humble dwellings to wave at and praise a king barely capable of keeping himself alive.

George shakes Katerina awake gently, and she thanks him with a soft kiss he can't help but shudder at, blaming his momentary spasm on the creeping frost. Will and Nathalie arrive a few moments later, and George nearly gasps aloud at the sight of his friend, his traitorous brother, looking impossibly harrowed, dark eyes perpetually red-rimmed. Nathalie clings on to him for dear life—not her life, but his—steady Will and offering George a weak smile that he barely returns.

*So we're all fucking falling to pieces.*

The king pushes the throbbing feeling of betrayal out of his heart, walking to a sitting room as servants scramble to unpack their trunks. Nathalie and Katerina chat softly, amicably, amid the crackling of the hearth, both casting concerned looks towards their partners.

George picks at the soft cushions of an armchair.

Will stares into space, bouncing his leg.

Karl and Nicholas burst through the doors moments later, livening up the sordid mood immediately. They look flushed and *happy*, and a strange, unfamiliar warmth blooms in George's heart as he embraces his friend, laughing softly as Karl begins recounting stories they shared during the journey. Less than a second later, a windswept and red-faced Dream charges through the doors, throwing a wide grin to the occupants of the room before noticing George, who visibly stiffens at the knight's presence.

"What are you doing here?" he says after a moment. The room falls silent.

Dream scoffs, disentangling himself from Nicholas' embrace to lay his scornful gaze on the king. "I am a knight, *your highness*, or have you forgotten?"

"Yes, but what are you doing *here*?" George presses, heart thudding heavily.

"Protecting the castle, or, did you forget what knights did?"

"Just don't get in anyone's way," George huffs, turning to stare at the fire angrily, causing Katerina to throw him another concerned look.

Conversation flows easily after their confrontation, with Katerina and Nathalie laughing as servants bring bread and cakes to snack on while dinner is prepared. George and Will both turn their eyes to the fire, the carpeted floor, the patterned armchairs, anything to avoid speaking to one another. Dream, Karl, and Nicholas settle into a raucous debate on chess, of all things, with Karl producing a stone board practically from thin air and explaining strategies with fervor, the two knights listening intently. Nicholas roars with laughter every time Karl makes a good move and slams his fist down in annoyance when he ends up losing to Dream. It almost seems like a family, save for Will and George, who continue to eye each other nervously as the afternoon progresses.

Amid the chatter, Katerina turns to Dream, smiling primly, and asks, "Dream, would you like to join us for dinner?"

George groans internally, shifting in his seat. Nicholas throws him a pointed look and the king quickly wipes his features of emotion.

"I'd be honored, your highness," Dream responds with a smile George *knows* spells danger.

The party socializes late into the afternoon, and Will retires to rest before supper, kissing Nathalie on the cheek softly and climbing up to the bedroom he's slept in countless times. George winces, wishing they were children again so they could explore the castle at night, stealing sweets from the kitchen and sliding down cold stone banisters, crawling into bed together and staying awake late into the night sharing stories of knights and dragons. The noise, the chatter, the unfamiliarity in his own home makes George's temples throb and his eyes burn. He scrambles from his armchair, excusing himself hastily. Katerina grabs his sleeve roughly as he's beginning to make his way out, and George jolts back, noticing Dream's icy stare as the queen whispers in his ear.

"Please be careful," she murmurs, gripping his arm tightly, "put a cloak on, put a scarf on. Please, George."

He nods, kisses her softly on the cheek, and steps into the mudroom to escape through a back door, pulling on a thick cloak and blue woolen scarf after a moment's hesitation. George stomps through ankle-deep snow, savoring the feeling of icy dampness seeping through the bottom of his trousers. The landscape is quiet, peaceful. It's remained relatively unchanged since George's childhood, with vast forests his mother refused to let servants trim, and the frozen loch, shimmering gloriously in the dying daylight. George trudges forward until the castle is at a safe distance, letting out a breath he didn't know he'd been holding in, feeling traitorous tears leak and turn to ice the minute they hit his reddened skin. He swipes them away, cursing himself for acting like a child, remembering his father's harsh words. *Men don't cry, George. Princes don't cry. Kings don't cry. Have you ever seen James cry?*

*Yes, George wanted to respond, I have. When he was seven, and you told him he was an imbecile for not understanding maths. When he was nine, and you slapped him after he broke a dinner plate. When he was ten, and you scolded him for sneezing during mass. When you made me go a week without dinner for being mouthy, and he snuck me food, and you found out. I've seen your son cry. Have you?*

The king stands frozen for a while, studying his land, eventually tugging off his gloves to pick up clumps of snow, letting the melting ice seep into the unhealed scratches marring his hands. George lets the cold sear him, feeling the chill break him into fragmented pieces, part by part, until a branch snaps, shattering the serenity. He whips around frantically, and Dream appears from a patch of trees, strong legs carrying him easily through the thick snow, mouth set into a grim line. George groans aloud this time, crossing his arms and turning toward the loch. Dream stands alongside the king, tilting his head down, and exhales sharply, breath creating a white cloud.

"George," Dream grunts.

"It's *your highness*," George mutters, looking at the ground.

"George," Dream continues, "spoken to Will yet?"

George feels his mind go numb with fury. "Really?" he spits. "You want to keep pushing this? When will you understand that, *no*, I'm not going to fucking attack Elytron. For one, my fucking *wife* is their princess. Their king has a position in my court. Their crown prince is best mates with Nicholas. Isn't he *your* fucking friend? Do *you* want to train Nicholas to slaughter his best mate? Besides, it should *not* be this much of a concern to you *or* Will. And finally, I said no already. Now drop it!" George exclaims, shifting away from the warmth radiating from Dream's body, away from the distinct scent of mint and liquor wafting through the air, calling out to George. *Come here, your highness. Come here.* Dream chuckles, kicking the snow with his boot, and George glowers, feeling his cheeks flame with a dangerous combination of anger and shame.

"Why did you come here?"

"I'm your fucking knight, George."

"That's all?"

"Yes, your highness," Dream says, running a gloved hand through his hair and gazing out onto the loch with a wistful look. "Believe it or not, you are not the center of my universe. I'm merely performing my duties."

"It would do you good, then, to stay in line. No more meetings with Will. I'll gladly hang you, but Will's my brother. I won't punish my brother just because you're leading him astray. The essence of your duty is to protect. Not defy, *protect*," George chides, approaching Dream and staring the



knight down harshly.

“*YOU ARE THE ESSENCE OF MY DUTY!*” Dream roars, shoving George roughly, causing the king to stumble backward in the snow. “You think I don’t understand how to run a kingdom? You think I didn’t learn the same lessons you and James did? I know what you need, I know what this kingdom needs. Will knows it, too. For God’s sake, your highness, get off your imaginary fucking pedestal and let me *help* you,” Dream growls, gesturing wildly. “And just so you know, Will was the one who came to me. He started this, and I’m going to fucking finish it, George, whether you’re with me or not.”

“God, fuck you!” George yells, stalking to Dream and ripping his mask off harshly. “Can’t even look me in the eye when you fight. Fuck you for thinking I’m not a good king. Fuck you for indulging Will. He’s not well, Dream. He hasn’t been for a long time. You’re taking advantage of him!”

“Will’s a man. I cannot say the same for you,” Dream spits, eyes locked on the mask in George’s hand. George seethes, feeling a crushing weight settle on his ribs. *I know*, he screams internally. *I know I know I know I know*. Rage floods George’s cells until his hands shake, and he wants nothing more than to feel Dream in his hands, punch him until they’re both bleeding and panting, feel the warmth of the knight’s skin against his.

It’s the only warmth he’ll allow.

Clouds of their breaths mix as Dream’s eyes shift from the mask in George’s hand to his freckled skin, tinted peach by the cold. “What’d you do to your hands?” Dream asks suddenly, his voice a husky whisper.

“Nothing,” George mutters, dropping the mask to the snow and shoving his hands in his cloak.

“Do you want to attack Elytron, your highness?” the knight murmurs darkly.

“I- I don’t know,” George replies, holding Dream’s gaze.

“You’d better figure it out quickly. And don’t fucking use Katerina as an excuse. I’ve seen marriages with much less kindling burn to the ground. Decide whose side you’re on.”

George nods, feeling his cheeks flame. “You’re committing treason,” he says sharply.

“I know.”

“Is it worth it?”

“Absolutely.”

George nods again, looking down and twisting his gloves.

“I made my hands bleed,” he mutters after a beat.

“Why?” Dream breathes, inching closer.

“Not sure.”

“Really?”

“No, I- I know why- I don’t- I don’t know,” George stutters.

Dream nods solemnly.

“What?” George murmurs. “Are you going to mock me?”

Dream shakes his head vigorously, casting a glance back towards the castle, glowing light emanating from its barred windows. “No, no,” he muses. “Not mocking. Thinking.”

“Alright.”

Dream hums, reaching out to grasp George’s hand. The king jerks away sharply, but Dream maintains his hold, pulling George in until they’re barely an inch apart. Slowly, Dream brings the king’s scabbed-over fingers to his mouth, pressing his lips gently, yet firmly, against the abuse. George exhales sharply, feeling himself turn to putty, feeling his insides liquefy and heat up until his skin buzzes. Dream bends down, bringing his lips to the side of George’s neck, pressing feather-light kisses to the fair skin. George leans against Dream’s hair and takes a deep inhale, losing all sense of space and time, allowing himself to float. After a moment, Dream comes up for air, cupping George’s face roughly and bringing their lips impossibly close, a centimeter apart, a simple brush that’s simultaneously far too much and not nearly enough.

“I can’t,” George whispers.

“I know,” Dream breathes.

They separate.

“I think I’ll go see how Nicholas is,” Dream murmurs, bending down to retrieve his mask. George watches him retreat, slumping down as longing floods his veins. He wants to cry out to his knight, wants just a few more minutes, wants *more more more more please more*. Out of some momentary lapse in reason, the king reaches down and packs a clump wet snow into a firm sphere, flinging it at Dream. It hits him squarely in the back and he freezes, turning around slowly.

“Did you just throw a *snowball* at me?” he asks incredulously, brows raised.

“Maybe!” George calls, feeling his heart flutter as a feral grin crosses Dream’s face. He drops his mask to the ground, scooping up snow to form a larger snowball, powerfully hurling it at George. Before the king can begin to react, it hits him in the chest, exploding ice over his cloak. George fakes a frown as he stares at Dream, waiting with bated breath for the knight’s next move.

George doesn’t know who moves first, but the quiet landscape turns into a slurry of ice and loud shrieks as they relentlessly pummel each other with snowballs, falling over laughing as the battle intensifies. Dream’s flinging two at a time, scooping snow up with both hands and hurtling them at George who tries (and fails) to dodge the projectiles as he catches one in the face, feeling ice melt on his tongue. George gives up on throwing, bounding towards Dream as fast as the thick snow will allow, tackling his knight to the ground and smacking him in the face with the slush. Dream groans loudly, grabbing George’s arms as they roll through the snow, the king’s laughter filling the chilled air. George collapses on top of Dream, breathless and giggling as the knight furiously brushes snow particles out of his eyes.

Dream growls and flips them so George is under him, wrists pinned, sinking into the snow, and George wishes he could just fall through the earth with his knight, tangled up and frozen together until the end of time. “You really fucked up, your highness,” Dream mutters darkly, getting to his knees and grinning as he starts dumping snow onto the king’s face. George screams, wriggling out of Dream’s grasp and surging forward so they fall over again. Dream laughs openly this time, holding George to him as they disintegrate into giggles, dark cloaks writhing against the white

landscape. George wipes tears from his eyes, sitting up to see his knight, who looks practically angelic with snow flecks scattered throughout his windswept hair and red-tinged cheeks glowing with laughter.

They lock eyes, and George is set ablaze.

The knight and his king walk back in silence, bumping arms every so often. Dream pulls his mask back on before stepping through the doorway, casting a glance over his shoulder.

“Sun’s setting,” he says.

George stops, looking back at the sunset as pinks, purples, and reds glow violently, twisting throughout the sky. The snow is placid as ever, shallow footprints the only evidence of their rendezvous. He tugs at Dream’s sleeve like a child, pulling the knight to his side as they watch the sun slip over the horizon, frosty breaths and a gentle titter of birds the only perceivable noises twisting through the fiery landscape.

Dream and George haul their cloaks, gloves, and scarves off in the mudroom, stomping their feet before stepping back into the living room silently, like they had just popped out for a quick chat. Katerina eyes George, beaming at him when she notices the knight at his side. George feels a twinge of guilt as he returns her smile, noticing Dream shift as he watches their silent exchange. The knight stiffens suddenly and makes a beeline for the fire, throwing himself down on a spare cushion and calling for Nicholas to fetch him a drink.

Dinner is loud. It’s delicious. It’s warm and inviting and happy and safe and feels like home. George sits at the head of the table, next to Katerina, across from Dream. He puts aside the anxieties of war, the dull ache residing in his heart, and the impenetrable, eternal chill that seems to follow him, engaging in animated debates with Nicholas and Karl as Dream watches him carefully, stabbing at his turkey and taking long sips of wine. Katerina and Nathalie chatter with each other, engrossed in some private joke George is certain he doesn’t care to understand. Will sits silently for the majority of the meal, until dessert, when he cautiously turns to George and speaks lowly.

“You know, then?” Will asks, slicing his cake thinly with a fork.

“Yes, Will,” George sighs.

“Alright,” he murmurs, “alert me when you’ve made a decision.”

George nods, flicking his eyes back to find Dream staring directly at them with an unreadable expression, pretending to indulge Karl as he slowly eats his cake.

The party migrates to the sitting room to play chess. Nicholas and Karl are too drunk to even stand, yet they challenge Dream to game after game. George watches with feigned disinterest as his knight skillfully maneuvers the pieces, deft fingers twirling the captured stone pawns absentmindedly.

He wins every time, a cocky smile erupting after Nicholas groans dramatically, slumping forward and admitting defeat.

Someone calls for champagne, and suddenly George is filling glasses, reaching Katerina last. “Oh, no thank you, love, I’m alright,” she chuckles, patting his arm. He nods and takes a seat, raising a toast.

“To Christmas!” he yells.

“Christmas!” the party choruses, downing their glasses. Katerina smiles at him approvingly as she sips her tea, and the guilt begins to fester again, forcefully caging George’s heart.

Carolers’ songs drift through the windows, mixing with the gentle clink of glasses and the buzzing din of sleepy conversations. As always, George searches for Dream, who’s positioned himself by the tree, glass of whiskey in hand, laughing quietly with Will. It feels almost normal.

Everyone retires hours later, yawning and saying their goodnights. Nicholas and Karl collapse into armchairs after their seventh round singing “Deck the Halls” and Katerina lays thick blankets over them, linking arms with her husband as they climb towards their bedroom. George sits on the bed and watches as the queen removes her jewels and makeup, rubbing cream on her hands and pulling pins out of her hair. They lock eyes in the mirror and she offers him a soft smile. Katerina looks younger like this, wide-eyed and innocent, almost frail. George drops his head as she changes into her nightgown, scratching the back of his neck lazily.

“Did you have a good time?” she whispers as they crawl into bed.

“Hmm,” he hums affirmatively. “Good time.”

“Talk to Dream?”

“Yes,” he sighs, shifting to look at her.

“And how was that?”

“Better, actually,” he murmurs, kissing her gently.

“Good,” Katerina replies, blowing out their candles. “Merry Christmas, my love.”

“Merry Christmas.”

George finds himself creeping down to the living room hours later, stone floors freezing under his bare feet. He sits alone in the frigid, moonlight-bathed emptiness, fiddling with the small parcel in his hands. The king turns his gaze to the glimmering tree, seeking out an old ornament he made with James out of a fallen pinecone and spare ribbons. He wishes Will was the same, wishes he was the same, wishes they were just children wreaking havoc around the castle again. No war, no responsibility, no fucking advisers, and no gremlin-like Albert breathing down their necks. It wasn’t fair. This wasn’t supposed to be his place. James was supposed to be alive.

George hears a clatter and a muffled curse and snaps out of his reverie. Dream emerges from the darkness, hastily making his way towards the parcels under the tree.

“Santa Claus!” George exclaims tiredly, rubbing his eyes as Dream shuffles blindly through the sitting room.

“What the fuck are you doing?” Dream cries, and George silently praises himself for startling the knight.

“Sitting. This is my castle.”

“Fuck you,” Dream mutters. “I meant, why are you sitting here? At this time.”

“Just pondering.”

“You’re an idiot.”

“What are *you* doing?” George asks through sleepy chuckles.

“None of your business, your highness.”

“What’s in your hand?”

“I said, none of your fucking business.”

“Fuck you.”

“Likewise.”

George grumbles to himself, watching as Dream plays the twine neatly wrapped around his parcel. “Who’s that for?” George calls.

“You ask too many questions,” Dream murmurs, grinning to himself as the king squirms under his gaze. “Who’s your’s for?” he inquires, motioning to the gift in George’s hand.

“I’ll tell you if you tell me.”

“No.”

George groans, flopping back against the cushions. *Now or never.*

“Catch,” he states simply, flinging the parcel at Dream.

“For me?” he taunts. “Trying to bribe me to not murder your father-in-law?”

“Open it,” George huffs, turning his gaze away.

“It’s not Christmas morning yet.”

“Would you like to open it in front of my wife?”

Dream rolls his eyes, violently ripping the package to shreds as George watches expectantly. “Are you proposing to me, Georgie?”

“No, God. It’s just... it’s a thank you. For everything. Forget it, it’s stupid,” George stammers, cursing himself. The king heaves off the sofa and retreats to his bedchamber, shaking his head and muttering angrily. Dream stands by the Christmas tree, dumbfounded, holding a thick gold ring in his palm and staring at the engraved lettering encircling the inside.

*Ad Astra*, it reads.

George wakes early the next morning, scrambling around so as to not be tardy for Christmas mass. As servants dress Katerina, he flings open their bedroom doors, ready to dart down to the foyer when his foot catches something small. A parcel, wrapped in twine sits neatly on the red carpet outside the massive wooden doors. George picks it up gingerly, unwrapping the gift with shaking hands, and pulls out a gold bracelet—a thin cuff tucked in a black leather box.

The king slips it on wordlessly, discarding the wrapping, trying to mask his grin.

They shuffle into mass silently. George and Katerina stand at the first row of pews, other churchgoers bowing their heads in silent reverence. Dream sidles up next to George right as the first hymn begins, and the king gasps softly, feeling cool metal flush against the skin of his hand. He tilts his head up to look at Dream, who’s staring straight ahead, mask concealing any form of

telling emotion. George presses back against Dream, letting out a shaky breath as their gold touches.

It's enough.

—

*Angels, from the realms of glory,*

*Wing your flight o'er all the earth;*

*Now proclaim Messiah's birth:*

*Come and worship,*

*Come and worship*

*Worship Christ, the new-born King.*

*Shepherds in the field abiding,*

*Watching o'er your flocks by night,*

*God with man is now residing;*

*Yonder shines the infant Light.*

## Chapter End Notes

hi :))

hope you guys liked this chapter! gold rush by taylor swift is a dnf song and I WILL DIE ON THIS HILL!

anyways, please let me know what you all think in the comments :) i really appreciate all the support... you guys are much too kind to me :) also look up pictures of balmoral castle if you haven't already. IT'S SO BEAUTIFUL

i hope everyone is taking care of themselves and staying healthy <3

here are the playlists, if you're interested (someone please teach me how to link things...)

dream: [https://open.spotify.com/playlist/5l85e23F74PsOa7uLq7L9f?](https://open.spotify.com/playlist/5l85e23F74PsOa7uLq7L9f?si=iI65mCmGSyC0CeJVdNnnhA)

[si=iI65mCmGSyC0CeJVdNnnhA](https://open.spotify.com/playlist/5l85e23F74PsOa7uLq7L9f?si=iI65mCmGSyC0CeJVdNnnhA)

george: [https://open.spotify.com/playlist/4P9WiG0oaqRRGNVzlVOwLI?](https://open.spotify.com/playlist/4P9WiG0oaqRRGNVzlVOwLI?si=yraGG5bGTWqlqWt9Zdq3VQ)

[si=yraGG5bGTWqlqWt9Zdq3VQ](https://open.spotify.com/playlist/4P9WiG0oaqRRGNVzlVOwLI?si=yraGG5bGTWqlqWt9Zdq3VQ)

katerina: [https://open.spotify.com/playlist/3qaTuuGmHdPFnUe0hQcxTD?](https://open.spotify.com/playlist/3qaTuuGmHdPFnUe0hQcxTD?si=ZXAUIZL3RcmIIUlsn1IYPw)

[si=ZXAUIZL3RcmIIUlsn1IYPw](https://open.spotify.com/playlist/3qaTuuGmHdPFnUe0hQcxTD?si=ZXAUIZL3RcmIIUlsn1IYPw)

will: [https://open.spotify.com/playlist/66FwNXv7tleBYTvqN6V87K?](https://open.spotify.com/playlist/66FwNXv7tleBYTvqN6V87K?si=Rec3kHNXSQWnLuT7sbiJug)

[si=Rec3kHNXSQWnLuT7sbiJug](https://open.spotify.com/playlist/66FwNXv7tleBYTvqN6V87K?si=Rec3kHNXSQWnLuT7sbiJug)

nathalie: [https://open.spotify.com/playlist/5Lak8aIil2D5K61c43sQvf?](https://open.spotify.com/playlist/5Lak8aIil2D5K61c43sQvf?si=Rec3kHNXSQWnLuT7sbiJug)

si=q\_\_figa9ThyVuM0Y2MzMxg

and here's the big playlist:

[https://open.spotify.com/playlist/34nRL5AY2mcoHpG1PDhdoA?](https://open.spotify.com/playlist/34nRL5AY2mcoHpG1PDhdoA?si=sYtDViFUThqPq9OxO7i1vA)

si=sYtDViFUThqPq9OxO7i1vA

as always,

love from the loglady <3

# Have a Cigar

## Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for [notes](#)

The new year arrives like an east wind. They drink sparkling wine on an open terrace in Balmoral Castle, gazing at stars pin-pricking the fleeting darkness, snow glowing listlessly as constellations lend their light to the earth. Katerina kisses George softly as the clock strikes midnight, chimes echoing throughout the entire castle as the stone floors vibrate with tenuous celebration. Nicholas and Karl envelop Dream in a bear hug he pretends to loathe, and Nathalie presses a chaste kiss to Will's chapped lips with glassy eyes and a soft smile.

George pretends like Dream isn't staring at him with *that fucking look*. The dangerous one.

Dream pretends like George isn't pulling him in with little more than his gentle laugh, tinkling softly like sleighbells.

They don't touch, they don't talk, they barely even look at each other for the rest of the stay in Scotland, but every time the gold on Dream's finger teasingly gleams at George, he feels that painful pressure crush his lungs—the yearning swiftly transforming into shame when Katerina appears with her demure smiles and gentle touches.

Dream and Will's meetings continue steadily into the winter months, with George knowingly turning a blind eye, realizing if he reprimands Dream, he'll have to punish Will. They'd hang together, as partners-in-crime, and the king would sooner die than even let a lash touch his brother's back.

He'd sooner die than let a lash touch his forgotten lover's back, too—the lover he's forever intertwined with through golden promises—flashes of delicious sin among whispered confessions.

The February frost brings continued hardship for the downtrodden farmers of Saudade, and when their king finally returns from holiday, there's a line out the castle gate of disgruntled citizens asking for food, aid, anything to keep them afloat. The advisers assure George everything will be alright, but in his heart, the king knows they're crumbling. Court becomes uncharacteristically argumentative, and the frenzied din echoes in George's brain, causing his eyes to burn with frustration and his heart to thunder menacingly against his ribs. It all comes to a head one day in mid-February—Will reaches a breaking point, dropping his head into his hands and yanking at his curls roughly. George looks around the table of men tiredly, scratching at the carved wood table until his daze is interrupted by a loud bang, a slam of skin and bone against hard wood. Parchment shuffles as the room falls silent, and George cranes his neck to see Will's fists resting on the table.

“Stop,” he breathes. “Let me speak. Just for a moment.”

The advisers break out into anxious murmurs as Will clears his throat, the irritating cacophony echoing throughout the hallowed room, bouncing off hanging paintings and tapestries, prodding at George's brain tauntingly.

“Let him speak!” George yells, earning him a grateful look from Will.

“Our present economic issues,” Will declares sharply, “are going to be the *death* of the monarchy. If we continue in this manner... My, er- friend resides in the villages—she- she hears things. We cannot let resentment for the crown fester. Resentment brews rebellion. I believe the only way



Saudade will recover from these losses is through a loan.”

“A loan,” an adviser grumbles, thumbing through a leather-bound book. “Who do you suppose will supply us with the money needed? The deficit is astronomical.”

George feels a sudden surge of warmth flood through his body, a sense of *purpose* returning to his tired mind. Will’s presented him with a rare chance to prove his worth, to prove that he’s a strong king, a capable king, a king that fights for his subjects rather than for glory.

“Sir Gould is correct,” the king murmurs suddenly, “we must borrow money. We’ll dole out half of it to various farmers and merchants, and use the rest to invest in better farming practices. It’s the only way Saudade can survive without devaluing gold.”

“We have devalued before,” Sir Philips croaks, “during King Charles’ time.”

George swallows, raising his eyes to scan the table of men staring at him expectantly. “We will *not* devalue,” he declares sharply. “It’ll ruin us. Politically, economically, socially—other nations will look to us and laugh. I will not look weak,” the king finishes, finding Will nodding fervently in his peripheral vision.

“Your highness,” Sir Philips argues, “my colleagues are correct. Who shall lend us money in times like these?”

“I believe Sir Gould can explain, he- er- seems to have planned this out quite well,” George mutters, causing Will to stand up and begin pacing past the wary-looking advisers. Will looks at George hesitantly, tilting his head slightly, almost as if to reassure the king. George wipes his clammy palms roughly on his trousers, meeting Sir Philips’ piercing gaze as Will speaks.

“King Albert, of Elytron,” he declares.

“Pardon?” Sir Philips sputters.

“Think,” Will insists. “His highness King Albert has a vested interest in the success of Saudade. His daughter is our queen, he has a position at court, his son, his *heir*, practically lives here. Trade is Elytron’s primary income generator—trade with its closest neighbor, Saudade. Trust me, King Albert will be just as hurt if we choose to devalue the coin. I suggest King George and I make an appeal to the king, in person. If we send a messenger now and set off for Elytron at first light, I am positive King Albert will relent.”

“Your highness?” Sir Philips inquires, “do you agree?”

“Fine, yes,” George nods, anxiety bubbling in his gut.

“There is one more thing,” Will murmurs.

“Yes, Will?” Philips inquires.

“Her Majesty the Queen should join us.”

“Whatever for?” George says, eyes narrowing. *I don't want her near me, please, I don't want her around me, I can't stand her around me.*

“Trust me, your grace, we’ll want her there,” Will states, meeting George’s gaze.

“Alright,” George mutters, averting his eyes. “Sir Philips, you and your men shall draw up

contracts to present to King Albert.”

“At once, your highness,” Philips replies, a grimace settling over his features. “Although, if this fails, we will be ridiculed even more than if we were to devalue now.”

“I believe everyone is well apprised of the risks,” Will says brazenly, opening a thick book of crop figures. “This is a risk we must all be willing to take, for Saudade.”

“For Saudade, then,” Philips declares.

“For Saudade,” the advisers echo. It's barely comforting.

George runs a finger along the edge of the table, watching as parchments are passed around and contract negotiations begin.

“I will take my leave,” he says lowly. “Sir Gould, see to it that my carriage is prepared for the journey tomorrow, and I would like a copy of any contracts that may be drawn up.”

He stalks off, casting a fleeting look at Will as the latter begins shuffling through parchment, scribbling furiously on the yellowed pages. An ink bottle spills in his frenzy, seeping into the grooves of the carved wood, and a slow trickle of the black liquid runs down the dark oak, dropping steadily onto the stone floor.

They set off for Elytron the next morning, an hours-long journey through winding hills and perilous cliffs overlooking the writhing sea. Katerina hands out baskets of bread and cured meats for the journey, smiling brightly as Dream accepts a basket with a grimace. Before they can pile into their respective carriages, Will tugs George close, whispering, “let me do the talking... I have a plan. Trust me, George.” The king nods apprehensively as unease fills his heart, breaking away to climb into a carriage with his wife, casting one last look back at the castle, his home.

Elytron is heavenly, nestled in a valley of green hills dotted with snow and colorful, blooming forests—warmer, brighter, and more prosperous than its northern counterpart. Snowy patches dotting the land sparkle brightly, illuminated by the sun, putting the dreary terminal frost of Saudade’s landscape to shame. Even parts of Elytron annexed to Saudade were slowly losing their vitality, almost as if a curse follows George’s rule, as if anything he touches is bound to wither away. Katerina visibly brightens at the sight of her homeland, nausea brought upon by the bumpy ride dissipating as sunlight streams through the rolling hills, through the open windows, and into the gilded carriage.

Albert paces outside the castle gates as the carriages lurch to a stop, arms open as Katerina embraces her father after a quick curtsy. George bows his head, as do Dream and Will, offering their respect to a king that surely merits none.

“Father!” she exclaims, “oh, how wonderful to see you!”

“George!” Albert bursts, pushing Katerina aside, sausage-like fingers grasping at the king’s bony arms. “Your first visit as a married couple! When your messenger rode in this morning, I was shocked to hear of the sad circumstances of this congregation. I assumed all was well in beautiful Saudade.”

“Yes, yes. Unfortunately, this visit comes under dire circumstances,” George grits out, fists clenched under his heavy cloak.

“No matter, I’m sure all will be sorted. Shall we discuss further inside?” Albert inquires, grinning sleazily. The guards flanking Elytron’s king shift, gripping their glinting swords as Dream steps

closer to George—instinctively, protectively.

“Yes, of course,” George says tightly. “You remember Sir Gould and Dream?”

“How could I forget?” Albert taunts, eyeing Dream with a suspicious glare. “So nice to see you both.”

“Pleasure’s all mine,” Will murmurs as Dream rolls his eyes.

Albert clears his throat as they walk to the castle entrance, George sidling up next to his father-in-law with Katerina gripping his arm, Dream and Will following at a safe distance, murmuring under their breath.

*They’re planning something.*

“Lunch, anyone?” Albert asks, spreading his arms welcomingly as they enter the grand palace, gilded mirrors and massive chandeliers glittering lightly.

Dream whispers in Will’s ear, and the private secretary nods before shaking his head pointedly at George.

“Er- no thank you,” George stammers, feeling his stomach drop at the concealed exchange. *Trust me, George.* “We cannot stay long, urgent business needs to be attended to upon my return.”

“Hmm,” Albert hums. “And here I thought you’d want to soak up as much of Elytron as possible before you go,” he says with a wink.

“We regret not being able to stay longer, your highness,” Will offers as Albert raises a hand, dismissing the guards flanking him.

“Please, let us discuss in the library,” Albert says, leading them through the foyer, towards a massive wooden door with gilded panels and a carved seal. Katerina smiles at George, loosening her grip and stepping back from the party.

“I’ll wait here, George,” she says. “Gosh, everything seems so different,” she murmurs, looking at the mirrored walls of the foyer with dazed wonder.

“Yes, Katerina, excellent idea,” Albert declares, pushing George into the library. “Go busy yourself, we won’t be long.”

“No!” Will exclaims suddenly, cringing as everyone turns towards him, shocked. “Er- I mean, her majesty the queen should join us. We’ve traveled so far to see you, King Albert. Surely you’d like to spend time with her highness?”

Albert’s eyebrows twitch as George glances at Will, who shakes his head minutely.

*What the fuck is he doing?*

“Excellent idea, Sir Gould,” Albert says after a moment’s silence. “Don’t disrupt, Katerina,” he chuckles. George tries to ignore the flash of hurt that crosses her features before the familiar smile takes over, a soft laugh spilling from his wife’s painted lips.

They sit at a small rectangular table, with Albert and George facing each other as servants pour drinks. George studies the library, a colossal room not unlike his own in Saudade, save for the stained glass windows that punctuate walls upon walls of stacked shelves, ladders leaning

precariouly against the dark wood. The red carpet is plush, and as George's boots practically sink into the soft fabric, he's transported to confession as Dream sits on that damned carpet, soft skin scraping against the cobbled wall as he— *stop, George.*

George absentmindedly swirls the amber liquid around in the crystal glass, clearing his throat as Albert watches expectantly. "Well, your highness—"

"Please, Albert."

"Albert, yes. There's no way I can put this delicately- er- Saudade is in need of a financial bailout of sorts."

"Ah, so I've heard," Albert chuckles.

"Yes," George continues through gritted teeth, "well, we were hoping you could provide us with a loan. We'd obviously pay you back, as soon as a fruitful harvest occurs. What we are seeking is a jumpstart to the economy."

"You've explored other options? You know, George, you shouldn't rush any decisions, seeing how- ah- *inexperienced* your position is."

"Forgive me," Will interrupts, wincing slightly. "Yes, your highness, we have. Our farmers are starving. Our citizens may go hungry due to the frost."

"Really," Albert laughs. "Yet you don't see devaluation as a viable option?"

"No," Will presses. "Absolutely not."

"Whyever not?" Albert presses.

Dream huffs, dragging his boot against the carpet as George throws him a pointed look that he hopes screams *shut the fuck up.*

"Your highness," George interjects, setting down his glass, "we refuse to devalue the coin, as I fear- we fear- it portrays weakness."

"Well, I must say," Albert guffaws with a glance to Dream, "weakness has already been more than portrayed."

"Your highness, children are starving. Young children. Good, hardworking farmers are losing their homes," Will says, eyes darting from George to Katerina, studying the queen shifting around uncomfortably.

*Oh.*

"Er- yes, Albert. Katerina always mentioned your generosity," George adds, observing his wife squirm. "There was one village child, barely a year old. Half froze to death on account of no fuel being available to light the stoves and lamps. And others, dying of influenza, unable to attend school, have been cast out onto the streets by parents unable to care for them" he continues, noticing the way tears well up in Katerina's eyes. "Any help you can offer us would be truly appreciated. You are a true ally of Saudade, and we will repay our debts with interest."

"Oh, please father," Katerina cries, "the poor children! You must help them!" Soft sobs tumble from her lips as George offers her a fleeting look of sympathy.

Albert looks bewildered, eyes darting from George to Will to Katerina, who dabs her overflowing eyes with a spare handkerchief. “Er- alright, alright then,” he concedes, patting his daughter’s shoulder awkwardly. “We will supply gold and some other material goods. Have contracts drawn up and I will review them. Saudade is a significant contributor to our trading economy.”

“Thank you, Albert, truly,” George says sincerely, tearing his eyes away from Dream, who raises a hand to hide silent laughter as Katerina cries softly.

“However, if I am to provide this stimulus, I wish to be an official adviser,” Albert interrupts, smiling wickedly.

“What?” George exclaims.

“Of course, your highness!” Will nearly shouts, casting a worried glance at Dream, who stares daggers at George. The king sinks back in his chair, rolling his eyes as Albert laughs.

“Alright then, settled. Will that be all?” Elytron's ruler questions, calling for their glasses to be taken with a raise of his portly hand.

“Yes, thank you,” George mutters.

“Katerina,” Albert says sharply, “you didn’t drink. Are you feeling alright?”

“Oh, just a little ill, father,” she replies, eyes sparkling. “Nothing to worry over.”

“Hmm,” Albert hums, clasping his hands behind his back, beginning to walk to the door. “Truly hilarious that you traveled this long to beg for money,” he chuckles, winking at George.

“Well it worked, didn’t it?” Dream grumbles, shoving the doors open.

“Now, I think it would be wise for you to depart,” Albert says loudly, cruelly. “I have a ball to prepare for.”

George nods, stepping out into the foyer.

“Ah. Nearly forgot. Before you go, Sir Gould, a word?” Albert says with a wry smile, beckoning the private secretary back into the library.

“Of course,” Will breathes, sending a panicked look to Dream. George stiffens, feeling anger curl in his gut, wondering why Will turned to the knight for help.

*You’re not really his friend anymore, George.*

George and Katerina sit outside on a stone bench, as Dream pretends to occupy himself with a clump of snow some safe distance away. Katerina runs her fingers along the roses that bloom outside the castle, absentmindedly picking at the sharp stems. Dream casts her a withering glance when the queen yelps, having pricked her slender finger on a thorn. A drop of blood oozes out of the wound, and she presents her hand to George shyly, looking up at her husband through darkened lashes. He raises her hand to his lips, sucking at the tip of her finger lightly, pressing a kiss to the back of her hand mechanically, clinically, detachedly. Dream stiffens and looks away, murmuring something about going to see where the other guards were caught up, stalking away from the royal couple.

They return to Saudade by evening, ambling into the castle just in time for dinner, Dream and Will disappearing once again to god-knows-where. The king and queen eat in silence, picking at their

food despite skipping lunch. After supper is over, George excuses himself to embark on a walk of the castle grounds, and Katerina returns to their chambers prematurely, citing a headache.

George saunters into the greenhouse, running his hand along neatly trimmed bushes and flowering plants, protected from the frosty air by glass walls and a paneled roof. He remembers tending to the garden as a child with queen Anastasia, spilling water onto the leaves of various vegetable plants. "Don't waste it!" his mother would chide, "you must water them at the root."

Exiting the greenhouse, George moves towards the apple orchards, stomping through the cleared paths between snow-covered trees, watching as the sun glides over the horizon. The village at the foot of the hill seems to glow invitingly as the evening dash begins to subside, merchants retiring tiredly to their homes as lamps are extinguished and prayers said. The king eases himself down onto a stone bench at the corner of the orchard, watching the colored sky swirl, losing himself in the painted heavens.

"George," a voice calls.

"Hmm?" he mumbles, whipping his head around.

"George, hello." It's Will, wrapped in a thick cloak, shivering as he settles down next to the king, sighing softly.

"Hi, Will," George murmurs. *How are you? Where were you? Are we still friends? Are you okay? Why don't you speak to me anymore? What happened to us?*

"Um- I cannot provide a full explanation at this time, and I'm sure I owe you one."

"Understatement," George mutters.

"Hah, yes, an understatement."

"Go on."

"I feel as though you should know, er- I know you have to punish us, Dream and I. I know I won't be allowed requests as a prisoner, but all I ask is that you don't hurt him. Please, George. It was all me, I orchestrated all of it, I promise."

"Pardon?" George breathes, turning to look at Will. "I- I was never going to punish either of you?"

"I asked you, though. I asked you at Balmoral if you'd made a decision."

"Yes," George whispers fiercely. "Made a decision on whether to attack or not..."

"I meant- I meant a decision on whether we'd hang for treason."

"God, what? What? You think I'd do that?" George cries, grabbing Will's arms roughly. *I'm your brother, I won't hurt you. I'm your brother.*

"I just assumed-"

"Well, you assumed wrong! I haven't made a decision on whether to attack or not. I'd be going against my own government if I chose to attack, you know that. Especially after today, giving Albert that position."

"It won't matter," Will says hurriedly. "Albert's position won't matter. We've analyzed the numbers. The loan can finance a full-fledged war and we'd have money left over for the citizens."

“What?” George exclaims. “You asked me to go to Elytron to beg my slimeball of a father-in-law to fund an attack against himself?”

“Well, er- it was mostly Dream’s idea, but yes.”

“You realize this sounds fucking insane.”

“Trust me, George,” Will says firmly, searching the king’s eyes. “You can trust me.”

“I haven’t made a decision,” George argues. “Don’t get too comfortable with your plan.”

“I know,” Will nods. “I understand fully.”

“Jesus Christ, Will. I didn’t think-”

“You didn’t think I was capable of this?”

“Well- I mean. Nothing’s going to be the same, is it?”

“Afraid not,” Will answers solemnly, kicking the snow underfoot.

“I’ll think about it,” George breathes, kicking a rock down the path as he raises his eyes to the stars.

*“That’s Leo, George. It’s a lion!” James shrieked, pressing his face to the window, pointing at a cluster of stars.*

*“That doesn’t look like a lion,” George had replied, wrinkling his nose. “That looks like a duck.”*

*“It’s a lion, trust me.”*

“George-” Will starts, interrupting the lost memories.

“Yes?”

“You’re getting along with Dream, aren’t you?”

“Er-” *Fuck*. Heat pools in George’s stomach, causing him to squirm under Will’s gentle, honeyed gaze. “No? Not quite. I just avoid him, mostly.”

“He talks about you. Asks about you sometimes.”

“Really?”

“Yes.”

“What does he say?” George whispers, almost scared to receive an answer.

“Not much, really. How court meetings are going, how you’re doing. Most of the time I can’t give him an answer,” Will chuckles ruefully. “We don’t see each other much, do we?”

George shakes his head numbly.

“D’you know his name?” Will asks.

“What?”

“Remember, you’d asked me what his real name was. Did you ever figure it out?”

“Oh- no. No,” George replies, shaking his head. *Clay, hurt me, please. Break me, Clay, harder. I’ll beg for you.*

“I’d thought as much. He told me a few nights ago when I asked. Said he’d never told a soul outside his family. Said it’s been so long since he’d been called by his true name, he barely even answered to it anymore.”

“Wow,” George whispers.

They walk back in silence, and for the first time in months, George feels like they’re on the same planet, the same wavelength, brothers reunited at long last. It’s a temporary warmth that fights off the dark tendrils that curl oppressively around George’s mind, mocking him at every turn. *Make a fucking decision. Make a decision.*

When the king enters his bedchamber, Katerina’s sitting at her dressing table bathed in soft candlelight, brushing her hair softly with a dazed expression.

“Hello,” George calls, tugging his shirt off. She stiffens at his arrival, setting down the ivory hairbrush with a clatter.

“George,” she beams, standing up and running towards him, arms wide.

“What? What?”

“I-,” Katerina breathes, throwing her arms around his neck. “I- I’m pregnant. You’re going to be a father.”

## Chapter End Notes

hi everyone! long time no see!

i’d gotten in kind of a writing rut, and various streams and other things prevented me from posting this chapter when i actually wanted to. but here it is, at long last.

hope you enjoy this chapter. thank you all for the kind words and continued support. it means the world to me :)

have a cigar by pink floyd and ahead by a century by the tragically hip are the songs for this chapter. definitely recommend taking a listen :)

some semi-exciting news: i think i’m also gonna be writing a few oneshots, just to clear my brain in the midst of all this angst, so look out for those, if you’re interested!

playlists:

dream: <https://open.spotify.com/playlist/5l85e23F74PsOa7uLq7L9f?si=iI65mCmGSyC0CeJVdNnnhA>



george: [https://open.spotify.com/playlist/4P9WiG0oaqRRGNVzlVOwLI?  
si=yraGG5bGTWqlqWt9Zdq3VQ](https://open.spotify.com/playlist/4P9WiG0oaqRRGNVzlVOwLI?si=yraGG5bGTWqlqWt9Zdq3VQ)  
katerina: [https://open.spotify.com/playlist/3qaTuuGmHdPFnUe0hQcxTD?  
si=ZXAUIZL3RcmIIUlsn1IYPw](https://open.spotify.com/playlist/3qaTuuGmHdPFnUe0hQcxTD?si=ZXAUIZL3RcmIIUlsn1IYPw)  
will: [https://open.spotify.com/playlist/66FwNXv7tleBYTvqN6V87K?  
si=Rec3kHNXSQWnLuT7sbiJug](https://open.spotify.com/playlist/66FwNXv7tleBYTvqN6V87K?si=Rec3kHNXSQWnLuT7sbiJug)  
nathalie: [https://open.spotify.com/playlist/5Lak8aIil2D5K61c43sQvf?  
si=q\\_\\_figa9ThyVuM0Y2MZMxg](https://open.spotify.com/playlist/5Lak8aIil2D5K61c43sQvf?si=q__figa9ThyVuM0Y2MZMxg)

big playlist: [https://open.spotify.com/playlist/34nRL5AY2mcoHpG1PDhdoA?  
si=sYtDViFUThqPq9OxO7i1vA](https://open.spotify.com/playlist/34nRL5AY2mcoHpG1PDhdoA?si=sYtDViFUThqPq9OxO7i1vA)

thank you guys, again, for everything.

love from the loglady <3

# Hourglass

## Chapter Summary

tw for blood

## Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for [notes](#)

The days pass sluggishly, blending into a waking nightmare as the castle bustles and hums with nervous excitement for the pregnant queen. George keeps his distance, letting ladies-in-waiting fawn over Katerina as she begins to send gowns for alteration, begins decorating the nursery, begins calling on doctors and midwives for checkups. He finds it sickening, watching her gleam with excitement, with wonder, as he struggles to breathe. The queen stares into her ornate dressing mirror in the orange morning light, pulling her nightgown taut to see the small bump, the small cluster of cells that will inevitably become a monarch. It's a celebration and a solemn procession, a sacred ritual to protect the bloodline. George's past, present, and future—his legacy—resides within an eighteen-year-old girl. He finds it eerily nauseating. She carries a heaven-sent angel within her, everyone says. An exalted gift. A sublime treasure.

Katerina attends church every day, praying for the heir's health, kneeling before the altar with those big blue eyes trained to the heavens. A child praying for a child.

She truly is a child. George comes to understand just how large six years of difference is, how horrifically underprepared his queen is to bear the crushing weight of living, of frightening responsibility. When they visit farmers to deliver aid, she excuses herself after seeing sickly babies dying of influenza, or the decrepit forms of elderly mothers caring for their vast litters of children. Katerina cries softly from within the carriage, hiccuping and crumbling into George's arms when he flings open the door, a carefully manufactured expression plastered across his face. *It's alright, it's alright. You'll be alright. You're safe, the baby's safe.* He's lying. Nobody's safe, not now, not ever. Not while they live in the sacred house of kings, not while they rule those who blindly follow, guided by those who yearn for power.

"Are you excited to be a father, your highness?" his subjects inquire.

He doesn't know how to say no.

George hides in the garden of Eden, the greenhouse his mother had commissioned during her time as queen. Dancing colors across pages of scrawled writing, sun shining through flower petals, the gentle veins of leaves curling around the room. The king's Eden has no order or conformity, it simply lives and breathes as a superorganism, thriving despite the coldest winters, despite the desolation, the inevitable fall from grace. He shelters himself from humanity, from Will and Dream and his wife and his unborn child, already painfully neglected despite never seeing the daylight dance through gold-spun wisps of clouds. George does what he does best, deflect questions and delegate tasks, behaving like a true monarch in his own right. Dream disappears for a week, then returns, then disappears again. The king knows what his knight and private secretary do during those lost days. He pretends he doesn't—hanging Will would surely send both of them—him and George—to the grave. Born as brothers, died as traitors. The morbid reality also remains, pulsating like an angry tumor—George knows a life devoid of Dream would hardly be a life worth living. He

knows if Will hangs, Dream must too.

The king despises himself, abhors the ugly secret he's harboring, damps it down until it's a furious storm, lying in wait.

He writes, spills his golden thoughts and dark thoughts and everything in between onto loose parchment, burning them at the hearth every night.

*I twist your gold into my skin and ache for you, I look to the stars and ache for you, I see the planets carving your name into the heavens, I see the universe love you and want to love you more. Will you wait for me? Will you come to me as you are? Will you have me as I am?*

*I search for you in my dreams, in the whispered, colorful passion that plagues my nightmares. It's green, it's gold, it's dark and inviting and it's you.*

*My love is not beautiful, my love is not inviting, my love is sharp teeth and sharper words, my love is breaking me the way I wish to break you. My love means recognizing you will never reciprocate, that you mustn't even attempt to reciprocate, for we will surely be cast from this tenuous garden to the deepest circle of hell. My love means I must hate you, and hate myself, and hate myself, and hate myself again. My love means battling you as I battle myself, my love means I will never love you—not the way you deserve, but the way I wish to.*

*I hesitate to ask, for I fear I already know the answer. Do you love me, too?*

It's infuriating. The absence causes George to burn alive, but the presence only throws salt in his wounds.

Dream finds him in Eden, nestled between the leaves, reading on a Sunday afternoon. It's the closest they've been in weeks, since the trip to Elytron. George knows Will is growing impatient, coming to realize Dream feels everything Will does, only with more ferocity.

"Your highness," Dream calls, maskless and disheveled, stalking through the rows of plants with a suspicious familiarity, like he was created and felled by the garden itself.

"Hello, Dream," George says, refusing to make eye contact, reading and re-reading the same stanzas over again.

"Not going to look at me?" he chuckles, dropping down next to George on the marble bench.

"Busy," George mutters, ignoring the blood rushing to his cheeks. "Reading."

"Well, if it's alright with you, I have a book I'd like to read as well."

"Fine," the king grumbles, "do that elsewhere."

"Come now," Dream tuts, producing a book from thin air. "That's no way to treat the captain of your guard."

"I'm the king," George retorts.

"And I guard you," Dream whispers back, ducking his head to bring his lips impossibly close to George's ear, "and that pretty, pregnant wife of yours."

"Stop. You wouldn't dare," the king seethes, his blood running cold. *Who are you?*

"No, of course not," the knight laughs, pulling away. "I'm not mad."

George wants to scream, or run, or maybe keel over and die on the spot. It was shocking, how easily Dream wormed his way under the king's skin, making a parasitic home for himself, feeding off fear and denial. "Could you possibly give me a moment's peace so I may finish reading this?" he huffs furiously, turning away from Dream. "I'm not interested in talking about the war. I spoke to Will, I'm thinking about it. Leave me alone."

"Georgie," Dream coos, "I'm not here to talk war. I'm here to *read*."

"Alright, then," George says sharply, "what are you *reading*?"

"Never thought you'd ask," he grins, "Historia Alexandri Magni."

"What?" the king scoffs, "You're reading the Alexandrian Romance? In Latin?"

"Yes, *George*, believe it or not, some of us prefer cultured activities to- er- *tavern dwelling*."

"I don't tavern-dwell!" George cries, shoving Dream roughly. He shrinks back quickly, realizing his error. "I don't know why I did that," George says breathlessly.

"You can do it again," Dream purrs.

"Stop," the king groans, hiding his grin.

"What're you reading?" the knight inquires, cracking open his book.

"Poems," George says simply, studying a rosebush.

"Hm, read me one," Dream teases, peering over George's shoulder conspicuously, causing heat to bloom in the king's stomach.

"No!"

"Come now," Dream soothes, "we're friends, George."

"We're friends?" the king asks incredulously. "You- nevermind. Alright, Dream," he resigns. "We're friends."

"So enthralled you've sorted that, your highness," Dream laughs wickedly, "Now read me a poem, or I'll remove the guard detail from your wife's chambers as she sleeps."

"What the fuck is wrong with you?" George mutters, eyes focusing on the open page in his lap. "Alright, my mother used to read this one."

"Very sentimental," Dream remarks.

"Shut the fuck up," George replies, taking a deep breath.

"What's it called?"

"I *said*, shut the fuck up!" George yells.

"Fuck you," Dream mutters.

"It's called Aedh Wishes for the Cloths of Heaven," George mumbles. "Just listen."

Dream nods, eyes transfixed on George's lips as he takes another heaving breath, allowing the

muggy air within the greenhouse to encase him fully.

“Had I the heavens' embroidered cloths,

Enwrought with golden and silver light,

The blue and the dim and the dark cloths

Of night and light and the half-light,

I would spread the cloths under your feet:

But I, being poor, have only my dreams;

I have spread my dreams under your feet;

Tread softly because you tread on my dreams.”

They remain silent for a long moment, breathing in unison, as Dream watches George's lips part and close again, culling the treacherous cliff they've found themselves teetering off before it's too late.

“Tread softly because you tread on my dreams,” the knight murmurs. The silence is deafening. George knows what he's just admitted through the stanzas of another, and he knows Dream heard him—he knows this confession means either the universe or nothing at all, knows he's just given his heart up, abandoning all hope of ever getting it back.

“Yes,” George deadpans, “that is what I said.” He ignores his trembling hands and shuts the book with a thump. “Your turn.”

“You want me to read this entire book to you?” Dream questions, refusing to meet George's eyes. The knight seems shaken, strangely, running his trembling hands down yellowed pages.

*Yes.*

“Well- no,” George stutters meekly. “Forget it.”

“Did your mother actually read you that poem?” the knight asks earnestly.

“Er- yes, all the time. It was her favorite,” George murmurs, feeling strangely at peace. “I haven't-I haven't read it since she died,” he confesses, wanting the Earth to open up and swallow him whole.

“We knew her, you know that?” Dream says gruffly. “We knew about her in Sweden. I think she'd visited us once, when I was very young, barely four. You weren't there. Just her and her sister. Russian princesses, my mother told us. Russian princesses who married English princes.”

“You- oh my god, *Dream*,” George whispers fiercely, tears pricking at his eyes. “You were the Swedish prince with the-”

“With the big dogs?” Dream smiles. It seems real. “That's me.”

“My mother *talked* about you. Why didn't you tell me?”

“We weren't friends,” the knight sighs. “We're friends now.”

“God,” George says, shaking his head, “the Swedish prince with the blonde curls, riding on the backs of huskies. The princess with big eyes who played the piano. The baby, the small baby boy. Your siblings?”

“Annika is my sister,” Dream nods, clenching his jaw. “Christian is my brother.”

“God,” George says again, under his breath.

Dream hums softly, tracing the marbled patterns of the bench. “How did she die, George?”

“Wh- You can’t just ask that,” he sputters. His heart physically hurts, convulses violently at any mention of her presence. George meets his mother in his dreams nearly once a month, beseeching her for help, for peace, for guidance. She presses a pale finger to his lips, promising all will fall into line. *Mum*, he wants to sob, *Mum, come save me*.

The knight finally looks up, letting George gaze into the green, the forests and hills and grasslands and gardens in paradise. “Can’t I?” he whispers, “We’re friends. Friends don’t keep secrets.”

“I suppose,” George breathes, longing to lean closer than friends are meant to be. “She- um-”

*“George! Call for a doctor! Call for a doctor, now!” his father shrieks. Blood, so much blood, red and warm and all over the table, the wine goblets, Henry’s hands, George’s white shirt, James’ napkin. Blood spilling, spraying, tumbling from his mother’s full lips, soaking everything. I can’t move, he thinks. I can’t breathe. There’s too much noise, too much color. James runs from the room, screaming for help as servants scramble to stop the bleeding.*

*Queen Anastasia dies at the dinner table, slumped over the poison meant for her husband. She takes the arrow for the man she loves, bears the burden of his status, his position, his responsibility. Father killed mother, George thinks, feeling salty tears sink into the scratches on his cheeks. Father killed mother, his mind echos, locking him in.*

“She was poisoned,” he finishes, kicking his feet against the earth. “Ate something meant for my father, um- we didn’t have tasters, me and her. No need, really—those who won’t reign won’t matter, I suppose.”

Dream nods, running a hand through his hair. “That’s awful,” he says quietly, low voice a near whisper. “I-,”

“You don’t have to do this, Dream.”

“Do what?” he scoffs, watching with flaming eyes as George stiffens.

“Pretend to like me.”

“I don’t like you, George, and I assumed you already knew that. I’m not pretending to like you. We’re friends. I’m being a friend,” the knight replies.

“How are you my friend if you don’t like me?”

“I- I pretend you don’t exist,” Dream murmurs, inching closer. Their noses brush, and George feels himself shake.

“Really?” the king whispers, praying the foliage is forgiving enough to conceal their sins.

“Yes,” Dream breathes, sliding their cheeks against each other, hunched over George in some form

of convoluted embrace.

“Why?”

“Because you kill me, slowly, like the twist of a blade, and once I’m bleeding at your feet you breathe life into me once more.”

“I do that?” George wonders aloud, feeling his nerves sing with longing.

“All you.”

“I can’t,” George whimpers, and God, what he’d give to close the gap.

“I know.”

It’s slow, unbearable torture.

“Call for me,” Dream swallows, “call for me when you’ve reached a decision.”

“I will,” George promises, watching his broad frame retreat, cast from paradise. *I will.*

The sun sets through leaves and flowers, vines and overgrowth, pink, orange, gold, red, and green, swirling and tumbling and gleaming as the sky sings to the earth. The garden cradles George in its loving embrace, promising him solace, a home where time moves like the wind, soaring and stopping as it pleases, but the king experiences no such comfort—George’s heart sinks to his stomach, churning around in acid and deceit.

Katerina lies in bed, sweating and delirious when George returns to their chambers. She mumbles softly, turning to look at him with bleary, red eyes.

“Kate,” he asks softly, “what’s wrong?”

“Oh, George,” she whines, “I apologize, I meant to have dinner with you. I just- it hurts terribly.”

“It’s okay,” he coos in the same honeyed tone his mother used when he’d get sick, “just rest.”

“George,” she whispers, grabbing his hand tightly, “I love you.”

*I’m sorry.*

“I love you, Kate. Sleep,” he murmurs as his blood turns to ice. *You don’t*, his mind screams. *Stop lying*, his heart sings.

*Oh, Hephaestion, do you not see? Do you not see how I crumble without you?*

*Scream your love for me to the stars. Let the universe accept your longing, let it send your words to me when the time is right.*

*Do you wish to burn me alive? Consume my very soul? Torture me until I beg for mercy? I know you cannot bring yourself to burn me—no, our love is not a fire.*

*Because when all is said and done and candles burn low, I realize our love is not red.*

*It’s gold.*

—

*They, looking back, all the eastern side beheld  
Of Paradise, so late their happy seat,  
Waved over by that flaming brand, the gate  
With dreadful faces thronged and fiery arms:  
Some natural tears they dropped, but wiped them soon;  
The world was all before them, where to choose  
Their place of rest, and Providence their guide;  
They, hand in hand, with wandering steps and slow,  
Through Eden took their solitary way.*

## Chapter End Notes

hi :)

i've decided on updates every tuesday. hopefully, this schedule is okay, as i'm going back to school soon.

aedh wishes for the cloths of heaven is a real poem by william butler yeats. it was published in 1899, but let's just pretend it's much older. dream is reading alexander romance, a book of tales about alexander the great and his exploits. the final quote is from paradise lost by john milton.

hourglass and till death are the songs for this chapter, both very beautiful.

i hate to self promo, but i'd love it if you guys read my oneshots!! i love writing them, it's a really nice break from de profundis. no pressure, but check them out if you're interested.

we're halfway through :) thank you all so incredibly much for your support. tell me what you think in the comments!

love from the loglady <3



# Machinist

## Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for [notes](#)

Katerina waltzes from her bedchamber dreamily, nodding to guards in greeting and resting a tentative hand on her stomach. The castle is coated in warmth, chugging to life despite the pre-spring chill, stubborn frost continuing to creep up the windows as wisps of greenery begin to shoot up. Life floats by for the young queen, fueled by feverish dreams and nervous exhilaration.

George is cautiously interested, conversing with doctors during weekly checkups, doubling her guard detail, having more and more dresses made. Katerina satiates her husband, making herself beautifully scarce, a passing whisper, a flower that blooms once a day.

It's normal, she convinces herself. It's to be expected, she repeats.

Nathalie drops in most days for lunch with Will, then makes her way to Katerina's chambers, trying to offer humanity, brightness, camaraderie. Housing an heir had proved to be a rather lonely affair, notwithstanding the consistent swarm of people; tittering ladies-in-waiting and solemn knights left the queen suffocated by her own condition—unable to enjoy so much as a solitary walk. And so, the queen of Saudade remained captive in her own home, bound to her quarters with silks and finery.

"Your highness," a gruff voice calls, "allow me to help you."

"Oh, thank you, Nicholas," Katerina replies, taking his outstretched arm as they start their descent down the grand staircase, boots clicking against the smooth stone.

"Headed somewhere special?"

"Picnic," the queen laughs, running her free hand down the banister, "with Nathalie. I know it seems strange in this weather, but I had to get out of the castle."

"That's understandable," Nicholas grins. "Don't know what I'd do locked in all day."

"It's awful," Katerina confesses with a soft sigh. "It leaves one feeling rather... tempestuous."

"Now *that*," Nicholas chuckles as they reach the ground floor, "is hardly a word I'd use to describe a queen."

She releases the knight, raising those big blue eyes to meet his. "I feel as though it's the *only* word to describe a queen."

Nathalie saunters up moments later, picnic basket in hand, linking their arms and tugging her away. They wave goodbye to Nicholas, setting off down the beaten path towards the apple orchards.

"How'd you get away?" Nathalie asks gently. "Here I was thinking you were under constant security."

"George would certainly prefer it that way," Katerina says, waving dismissively, "he'd rather I be chained to my bed than be out here, experiencing my last few months of freedom before this," the queen gestures to her stomach, "whole ordeal turns truly unbearable. I sent the ladies-in-waiting to town to buy fabric, then let it slip that they were awfully lonely, looking for knights to keep them

company. I assume my grand procession of protectors are probably up to their necks in wine and women down at a tavern.”

“Kate!” Nathalie cries, giggling softly.

Katerina smiles, rolling her eyes mischievously. “What? Oh, you wouldn’t understand. The days drag horribly. It was exciting at first, getting fitted for new gowns and all the doting, nervous attention. But now- now it’s just another excuse for George to avoid me, another excuse to be paraded around like a show pony.”

“He’s still-”

The easy smile falters as Katerina presses a protective hand to her stomach. “It’s not- it’s not that bad. He’s awfully busy.”

“Hmm,” Nathalie hums, shivering. “Well, he is the king.”

They reach a small clearing—a carved wooden bench amid a circle of apple trees struggling to sprout under glacial conditions. Nathalie sets down the basket, producing wrapped sandwiches, bread, cheese, and a small flask of wine.

“This is for me,” she explains. “I brought lemonade for you. Will claims it’s a big thing in Paris.”

“Oh yes, Karl and I had this a few years ago,” Katerina murmurs, inspecting the glass bottle, “back when we visited my aunts. I’m excited to try your sandwiches, though. George rants and raves about these.”

“God, I know,” Nathalie chuckles. “He and Will are obsessed. That’s how I met them.”

“Over sandwiches?”

Nathalie sighs, shaking her head. “No, no, the original story isn’t that... proper. They were sixteen? Seventeen maybe? They used to go to every tavern in town, trying to get drunk off cheap beer that the innkeepers purposefully watered down. They weren’t exactly inconspicuous—visiting nobles recognized them and wrote several stern letters to the king. I think George kept all of them in a box somewhere. Anyways,” she laughs, taking a sip of wine, “they needed shelter because George drank himself sick one night. And so the story goes.”

“I had no idea,” Katerina says, offering Nathalie a smile. “I don’t know much about George- er- from before.”

Nathalie nods solemnly. “He’s busy. Will’s busy too. It’s just... a lot of responsibility. I suppose it doesn’t help that they still behave like boys.”

“They do, don’t they?” the queen laughs, taking a bite of bread. “It’s funny, somehow I knew my life would end up precisely like this. I just didn’t fathom it happening so- so *fast*.”

“What do you mean?”

“Married. With child. It’s a bit much.”

“Royal life, I suppose,” Nathalie offers, taking a bite.

“I’m not royal, though. Well, I wasn’t born royal. Noble, yes. Highborn, yes. Not royal. George is true royalty. Saudade’s been his family’s birthright for generations... even Elytron rightfully

belongs to him. My father took it by force—we're not *actually* meant to be ruling," Katerina murmurs, shuffling her feet against the earth. "I've been told since birth: marry a king. Cement the bloodline. But- but- I'm done now. I've fulfilled my supposed purpose, haven't I?"

Nathalie tilts her head, fidgeting with the wine flask. "You're here now. You've married a king. You want more, though, don't you?"

The queen shakes her head, taking a cautious sip. "Not more, not exactly—I just *crave* a purpose. I was raised like cattle, except instead of slaughter I'm sent away to an unknown kingdom with an unknown man. I suppose it is rather like slaughter, when one really thinks about it," she says ruefully.

"Mm," Nathalie hums. "God, I can't imagine... you must realize, though, this isn't your only purpose—marry George, bear his children. There must be more."

"It seems so, doesn't it? There *should* be more than being defined by the men who defile us. Well, I've been defiled—I've been dragged through the reeds, in more ways than one, and the future's looking quite bleak."

"Where is this coming from, Kate? You- you haven't been *defiled*, you're bearing life!" Nathalie cries, gently grasping the queen's icy hands.

"I am bearing the son of a man who cannot spare me a sideways glance," Katerina spits, uncharacteristically cold, "I am paraded around to his subjects, beaming and waving and showing them kindness, showing them humanity, showing something I *assure* you George has never been able to offer them."

"Will mentioned that- that George was taking you around to all the farmers," Nathalie murmurs, tightening her hold.

"Yes," Katerina swallows, "and those poor farmers we hand alms to—they- they would be raiding this castle with pitchforks and torches if not for me. George tosses them bags of wheat—tosses them food like it's nothing, like they're *animals*. I sit with them. I cry with them. I hold their starving children and wipe tears from their eyes with silk handkerchiefs. And the most- most *wretched* part of it all is that he sees this as a *weakness*. I want them to be my purpose, I want to help them, but George treats me like a hysterical child. I'm shut away, only brought out to smile and wave and show my steadily growing abdomen, then shut away again."

"God," Nathalie whispers, "I want to speak to Will about it but I don't know if he'd-"

Katerina shakes her head dismissively. "Don't. Please. It's just—I show them compassion, Nathalie. Without any complaint to him. Not for my own sake, or the sake of my marriage, or *any* man—I show them compassion because I *feel* compassion. He feels frigid nonchalance—to me, to his subjects, to everybody on this earth. And, God forgive me, it makes me *sick*."

"I wish I could do something."

"You're doing enough. You give me hope, Nathalie. I have a companion. It's enough for me," the queen says, kicking a piece of ice. "Goodness, that felt good to unload. Forgive me. I just- it's been hard."

Nathalie shakes her head fiercely. "No, you should- er- talk. Write. Write me if you can't talk. Sing. I've heard screaming into one's pillow is quite cathartic. Do whatever you can, but- but this is no way to live, Katerina, you must know that."

“I know. It’s- it’s both of us, really. He’s unfit to be a ruler, to be a husband, and I am entirely unfit to be a wife. I try to love him, though. Parts of me do love him, and always will. I’ll have to try harder for my child—that’s all that matters now.”

Nathalie nods, swallowing roughly. “For what it’s worth, I grew up in town. We weren’t poor, but definitely not ‘highborn.’ People take notice which royals show humanity. They know you’re trying.”

Tears well in Katerina’s eyes. “I just- I always wanted to do something bigger than myself.”

“I know,” Nathalie soothes. “We’re all casualties, though, aren’t we? I knew the day I fell in love with Will that life wouldn’t be the same. We’re all casualties of the crown—every last one of us, even George. It’s an occupational hazard. I undergo the odd looks and simpering stares Will and I get. I undergo being reduced to a piece of meat on his arm, a charity case, a souvenir from the villages. I listen when he’s stressed, I dry his tears, I stitch his wounds. I do it for love and I get love in return. I get someone who debates political theory with me over Sunday dinner. I get someone who buys me roses in the dead of winter. I get someone who values my happiness, my safety, my time, my respect. I get an equal, I get a partner. What are you getting? What is George giving you in the push-and-pull?”

“I don’t know,” the queen whispers.

Nathalie sighs, running a thumb over the back of Katerina’s hand. “How old are you, Kate?” she asks, trembling slightly.

“Nineteen in a month.”

“I’m twenty-one.”

The queen smiles sadly. “It’s not fair, is it?”

“No,” Nathalie says quietly, letting out a chilly breath. “Not fair at all.”

—

George drops into the tub, letting scalding water fizz around his ears and submerge him completely. Gleaming sunlight streams through the windows in colored streaks, swirling and coloring the clear water as the king sinks deeper, exhaling bubbles to the surface.

“Are you trying to drown yourself?” a muffled voice calls.

George bursts from the depths, shivering as the cool air hits his skin. “Oh God, not you,” he groans, leaning back against the tub’s edge. “How did you even get in?”

“I- God, you’re stupid,” Dream spits, unclasping his mask and tossing it aside.

“Fuck you. Did you need something? Or has your harassment of me progressed to bathtime meetings?”

“I need a bath,” Dream says simply, unlacing his shirt and tugging it off. “I’m filthy. Trained the knights today.” The knight sits on a ledge and undoes his boots, then drops his pants, stalking over to George.

“Wha- what the fuck are you doing?” the king exclaims, eyes widening in shock. His veins throb with fury and something far more traitorous.

“We’re friends, remember?” Dream soothes, gently lowering himself into the tub as water drips over the sides. “I’m endeavoring to convey- er- *friendship*.”

George falls silent, watching the water slosh back and forth as Dream situates himself, stretching out long, tanned limbs with a grimace. *Go away, you’re too close, go away, go away, come closer, go away.*

“Why are you here?” George blanches, transfixed by the rivulets of water streaming from the knight’s shoulders.

“I need a bath,” Dream repeats, reaching out and tugging George’s limp arm, maneuvering him like a ragdoll so the king’s back is pressed up against the knight’s torso. George feels Dream’s muscles flex and shudders violently, goosebumps erupting across his skin despite the steaming water.

“What’s wrong with you?” Dream coos, dragging a hand up and down George’s spine to feel knobs of bone. “Are you scared?”

*Get out, go away, too close, you’re too close, come back, get out, leave me alone.*

George shakes his head, struggling to ground himself, to concentrate on the stained-glass windows—a mermaid stranded on a cliff, singing to the sea, a lost sailor searching for land. He studies every panel, every colored shard, determined to remain stolidly detached as Dream begins tracing the dips between his ribs, pressing down bruisingly to make George hiss.

“Stop that,” he murmurs.

“No,” Dream replies, faint yet firm, full lips pressed to the king’s hair. It’s not gentle, George knows that. It’s not kind. It’s *not* loving.

George knows that.

He makes a motion to pick up a scrub brush resting on a stool near the tub. Dream watches George’s scabbed fingers curl around wood and bristles, then shifts, wrenching the brush from the king’s hand and flinging it across the bathroom.

It hits the wall with a resounding smack, clattering to the floor.

“You don’t need that,” Dream grumbles, low and threatening, “don’t I maim you enough?”

“Not nearly enough,” George mutters with anomalous honesty, gingerly sinking back to join their skin once more.

The king and his knight sit in silence for a long moment. It’s unsettling—this level of fragile civility isn’t instinctive to either man, but somehow, *somehow*, they maintain decorum. Skin warms skin beneath the lilac-scented water as George continues to study the steam-streaked windows casting shadowed designs upon the stone floor.

“Can I wash your hair?”

It’s more a command than a question, more demanding than inquisitive. George stiffens against Dream, sucking in a deep breath before answering. “What?”

He doesn’t respond. Dream straightens, stretching a toned arm out to grip a bar of soap resting by the tub. George’s eyes track supernovas of freckles scattered on the knight’s tanned flesh, watching the newborn stars adorning Dream’s arms stretch and pull as he brings his arm up to the base of the

king's neck. The knight's hands and arms barely move, but his fingers work up a firestorm—lathering soap and massaging it into George's scalp dutifully.

He tugs. He pulls. He scrapes and he scrubs. He yanks and he twists. He isn't gentle.

George's eyes water and his brain goes the consistency of runny eggs as cruel fingers comb through his hair, gracelessly scrubbing and undoing knots.

"Can you be a little more gentle?" he cries, wriggling out of Dream's grasp and twisting his neck to face the grinning knight.

"I can," Dream murmurs, absentmindedly combing George's hair backward. "Don't think I will, though," he finishes, pressing soft kisses to the king's neck, scraping his teeth against dripping skin. It's a warning.

"God, I fucking hate you," George whines, swatting Dream's hands away and digging his nails into the scarred flesh, sensing tendons flex under his fingertips with pitiless curiosity. *Let me hurt you, Hephaestion. Let us interlace until we are unrecognizable—cut from the same bloodied, mangled cloth.*

"Likewise," Dream growls, lathering his hands once again. "Now shut the fuck up and let me finish."

George huffs, settling back and allowing him to continue the attack.

Soft hands wash the soap from George's hair.

He cradles. He strokes. He combs and caresses. He worships and praises. He's gentle.

George is floating, flying above the clouds, touching every constellation and galaxy, every quasar, every wisp of every nebula, trying to memorize, learn, remember so he can glide back down to find them spelled out onto Dream's skin.

Dream is lost, lost in a sea of pale skin and protruding bones, vicious angles piercing his flesh. Lost in sinking depths and murky trenches of darkness and sharpness and duplicity. He tries to swim, surge, claw his way back out to humanity, to reality. It's futile. It's addictive. It's George.

They're devoted and destructive—lost in the depths, hurtling through the stars.

"It's funny," Dream purrs, resuming his appraisal of George's ribs, "I could snap your neck right now."

"Will you?" George breathes, tensing slightly.

"Another time."

It's not loving, George knows that.

Dream washes him off, then starts on his own hair, silently scrubbing as George stares, wide-eyed and barely breathing.

"Until next time, your highness," the knight says when he's finished.

"Right," George mutters, inspecting his wrinkled fingers.

Dream dries himself, tugging his clothes on, and leaves wordlessly, leaves George among swirling

currents and soft light.

The king seeks out his private secretary after the castle's gone to bed, after Katerina's safely tucked in and the guards are hardly alert. George wraps a cloak around himself and sets out for the offices, sheltered in a hidden wing.

Will's buried in a book when he enters, writing scratchily in the margins as George drops himself down into an armchair opposite the desk.

"Hello."

"Hmm," Will hums, orange light intensifying the growing crescents beneath his eyes. "George."

"I- I need to ask you a question."

"Does it have something to do with Dream entering your bedchamber right after servants heated your bathwater and exiting with wet hair?"

George pales. "W-what?" he stammers. "What?"

*Please, God, please, God, forgive me, God.*

Will sighs, throwing down the quill and leaning back in his chair. "I saw him leave. You're lucky the guards didn't notice."

"How do you-"

"George," Will says, absentmindedly twisting his curls. "He told me you were- what was it? 'Becoming competent.' When has that man *ever* called *anyone* competent? Meanwhile, you stare at him like you want to slaughter him, or jump his bones, or, God, I don't know what. Oh, and we're getting away with this- this- little battle plan," he grumbles, gesturing to the maps and diagrams strewn across the desk, "and somehow I think it's because of more than just your loyalty to me."

"Will," George breathes, feeling shame close ensnare his heart once again, "I-"

"I don't care. Seriously. I don't. Fuck whoever you want." A strange look crosses Will's face as George scrambles for air.

"We're not *fucking*!" he hisses. "We're not. It's- no. We're not fucking. I'm- I'm drawn to him in a way that makes me physically sick. He takes up my entire- he just- he's revolting and intriguing and I want *more*."

Will nods, suppressing a grimace. "Alright. Well, I don't care, George. I mean, good for you, but it doesn't affect us whatsoever. You're my brother."

"God, Will. Fuck, alright," George stutters, fisting a hand in his hair. "I'm sorry."

"Don't apologize. Never apologize," Will murmurs, resuming his writing. "Was there something else?"

"Er- yes. I- I was going to ask- well he asked me, in Eden, a few days ago—he asked me to come to him when I've made a choice whether to attack or not."

"Listen," Will starts, dropping the quill once again. "I want to go to war. Dream wants to go to war. You should want to go to war. I think it's the wisest choice. We've managed to greatly weaken

Elytron through the land acquisition and financial bailout. It's the rational choice." He stumbles over his words, pointing blankly to figures and drawings. "But if you go to war for Dream, or don't go to war to spite him—what I'm trying to say is, *do not* let that man affect the decisions you make for *your* kingdom. It's your throne. Act like it."

George nods. "And Katerina? How- how will I continue- how do I continue being her husband, when I'm—"

"Ah, right," Will swallows, absentmindedly tracing a finger along the candle holder beside him. "I don't know the precise nature of your relationship with Dream, but I think you should try to do as little harm as you can to the woman that loves you." Will studies George's face, choosing his words carefully. "I wake up every single day and attempt to fabricate a world for Nathalie—a world in which she will never be mistreated, by me or any other."

He draws a shaking breath, scratching at the wooden desk.

"I don't tell her I create this world, but she knows I do... She trusts me. She knows I refuse to abuse my power, and in turn, she wields power over me. You and the queen are a different beast entirely, but I know—I *know*, George. I know if you create a world for her, she'll live in it blissfully. Willingly."

"What- what do you mean?" George mumbles, watching a stream of wax dribble onto the desk.

"Do what you need to do—for your child, for your wife, for yourself. Do what you need to do to survive, George, but *do not* suffocate others in the process."

George pales, lifting his eyes. "Do I suffocate you?" he whispers, barely willing to accept an answer.

"Yes," Will says simply. "I don't mind—it's my job to fan your flames, George. I've known you for my entire life, but that woman waiting for you upstairs—she's known you, what, six months? She doesn't deserve suffocation. That child she's carrying for you, the future of your kingdom, *your bloodline*, doesn't deserve suffocation."

"I know."

"Have you read Marlowe?" Will inquires. "Edward the Second?"

"I think I'm related to Edward the Second," George says numbly.

"Er- yes. You probably are. Anyways, there's a quote: 'The mightiest kings have had their minions; Great Alexander loved Hephaestion, The conquering Hercules for Hylas wept; And for Patroclus, stern Achilles drooped.' That's to say—you'll have devotees that you'll bleed for and devotees that'll die for you. You will encounter those few men that are as close to an equal as a king can achieve. Don't hate yourself for them falling at your feet—but your wife, your child? They are not your equals. You cannot let them fall. Hold them like Atlas holds the world, no matter what the cost."

The shame is nearly too much to bear, writhing and churning in the pit of the king's stomach. George's hands tremble conspicuously as he smooths his cloak.

"I will," he promises. "I'll try. Thank you."

"Good," Will sighs. "Go from the bookshelf."



“Why?” George inquires, rising from his seat.

“Safer at night. Should be careful.”

“Alright, Sir Gould. Thank you. Truly.”

“Anytime, King George,” Will replies, throwing him a wink before returning to his scribbles.

The king pushes open the bookshelf, the hidden exit that leads to a corridor of often-neglected advisers’ offices—a shortcut to his chambers.

George’s heart throbs uncomfortably as he walks back, guilt and acrid disgust escaping the pit of his stomach and coursing through his entire body. A door is cracked at the end of the hall, and George quietly shuffles past as conniving whispers and soft candlelight emanate from within.

*“He won’t see it coming... April...”*

*“Kings have been dethroned before... this boy is no longer...”*

*“We will need to move carefully... calculated strikes... this crown will fall...”*

*“Cannot hide behind his father’s ghost... cannot run from...”*

The voices grow louder and louder, echoing between George’s ears as his eyes widen. He turns and runs, runs *fast*, boots violently thumping against stone floors as he sprints to Dream’s tower.

It festers, the guilt, the resentment, it festers and bubbles and spurts like an infected sore. It consumes the king alive, condemns him to a half-life, a purgatory of instability and insecurity.

*Make a decision, your highness.*

*Make Anna proud. Make your brother proud.*

It’s a turning. It’s hardly monumental—no strike of divine intervention, no glowing light from within—it’s a gentle click of gears falling into place, locking securely. They chug slowly to life. They spark against one another. They set the king ablaze.

George pounds on the door desperately, lungs burning and itching with excitement despite the reverberating voices in his mind. He splinters the wood, lets his scraped fingers crack open and bleed once more. Dream flings open the door after a minute of incessant knocking, mask on, shirt off.

“I’m in,” George blurts. “I’m in all the way. I’m going to attack.”

“Great,” Dream says breathlessly, casting a fleeting glance over his shoulder. “I’m busy.”

The door slams shut.

## Chapter End Notes

hello, thanks for reading. i hope everyone is doing well and taking care of themselves.

edward II is a real play by christopher marlowe, published in 1593. songs are

machinist by japanese breakfast, i'm not in love by 10cc, and space & time by wolf  
alice.

thank you again, for everything.

love from the loglady <3

# Time

## Chapter Summary

tw for violence and blood

## Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for [notes](#)

George was born in the choler of war, given life in the midst of his grandfather's tireless conquest of the British Isles. Victory was second nature to King Charles, cascading through jagged scars and battered veins, interlacing with the blackened metal swords he commissioned from faraway lands—punishing weapons morphing into a morbid extension of his very flesh.

War was George's childhood, his birthright—days of apple picking and swimming in the river were shrouded by nights climbing into bed with James amid cannon blasts, watching through castle windows as men from far and wide assembled in Saudade, willing to bleed, willing to burn.

Destined for greatness. Handpicked by the heavens.

King Charles was a God-fearing man. He knelt before the altar before setting out for battle, hunched his tired body over, and pressed his forehead to the chilly stone floor. He whispered prayers for health, for victory, for glory, for safety and prosperity. Whispered prayers for young princes tucked away within the castle walls—a voice that commanded thousands shrinking down and down and down to beg for the safety of a mere few.

"It's humbling, Georgie," he'd rumbled after the young prince stumbled upon Charles' silent reverence, lingering in the back of the abbey to watch his grandfather kneel. "I'm thanking God."

"For what?" George asked as he drew closer, craning his neck to examine the altar, the fractured windows, the dark beams lining the ceiling.

"We must thank Him—for the responsibility, for entrusting our blood with duty, with purpose. Before we depart, I ask Him to guide me—er- here, look at this," Charles replied, handing George a small, leather-bound prayer book.

*You are my war club, my weapon for battle—with you I shatter nations, with you I destroy kingdoms. With you I shatter the horse and rider, with you I shatter the chariot and driver.*

"You are my war club," George recited slowly, bolded words heavy on his tongue. "My- my weapon for battle. Who's the war club?"

"God," Charles said gruffly. "I answer only to God. When your father becomes a king, he'll answer only to God. When Jamie becomes king, he will, too."

George watched his grandfather rise. "And does father pray? Before he goes to war?"

Charles' face twisted into a grimace, looking from the young prince to the flickering candles lining the hallowed halls. "Your father... your father has yet to find God," he murmured, leaving George before the altar, turning wide eyes to the heavens in silent inquiry, silent prayer.

---

George sleeps gracelessly, writhing against too-soft sheets as images of Dream taunt his aching mind. It seems like a cruel joke—repeatedly stumbling upon his knight in moments of passion—some sort of payback, karmic retribution for that night after the river, all those months ago. Each encounter serves as a painful reminder of George’s position, his God-given status. Men die for the crown and kill for the crown, bleed and burn for it, yet the nauseating, treacherous thought lodges itself securely in George’s mind—the thought that he’d give it all up in an instant if it meant those bitten lips would grace his frozen skin once more.

It’s a fantasy. He knows that—plush lips hide sharp teeth that yearn to see him bleed, break, suffer. It’s a romanticization. He knows that—Dream’s presence causes fury to bubble in the king’s throat just as much as it causes longing to fester in his heart.

George knows that.

Morning comes furiously, with wafts of stale smoke seeping through drafty windows, bathing the castle in an oppressive haze. George stumbles into Will’s office once more, ash and traitorous deceit reverberating in his mind.

“What is it?” Will asks, brows furrowing as George fidgets at the door.

“Smoke,” George murmurs.

“We’re burning the forests,” Will replies tiredly. “Making room for more crops. If you’re worried about Katerina we can have her moved to the countryside.”

“No, no. It’s alright.”

“Okay,” Will murmurs. “Anything else?”

George’s eyes flit to the massive bookshelf behind the desk, counting one-by-one—leather-bound spines spun with gold.

“I left through the bookshelf last night,” George starts, stalking into the room and closing the door sharply. “I walked through the halls of meeting rooms, past offices and small libraries. My meeting rooms, my offices. My libraries.”

“Yes?” Will inquires, leaning back in his chair with a sigh. “And?”

George stiffens, sliding a boot against the plush carpet. “You really don’t know?”

Will shakes his head numbly. “What is it?”

George draws nearer, feeling all warmth drain from his tired muscles. Ice shoots through the king’s spine as whispers of mutiny and traitorous contempt close a tight fist around his chest. “My advisers,” he spits, “are planning to overthrow me. I heard them plotting last night. They’re waiting until the last of Albert’s stimulus gets here, then I’ll be ousted. Murdered, most likely.”

It’s painful to admit—frozen hands shudder with feeble anger, masking the shame, the failure, the fucking gut-wrenching inadequacy.

Will straightens, running a hand through matted curls as an unreadable expression crosses his face. He glances from George’s darkened gaze, to the various trinkets and papers scattered around him, to the large portrait of King Charles on the opposite wall.

“We’d- you’d better deal with it, don’t you think?” he murmurs, scratching at days-old scruff.

George cocks his head, stomach dropping at the saccharine nonchalance. “Deal with it?”

Will stands, ambling over to the door to throw it open and summon a servant with a flick of his hand. “Call the advisors,” he commands. “I’ll find Dream. Throne room in ten minutes.”

He allows a strange smirk to fracture painfully sunken features. “Go, King George. I’ll be there soon.”

George eyes the chandelier as he enters the throne room, now flanked by several smaller glass pieces. Katerina’s doing, no doubt, to transform the castle into a display of strength, of wealth, when Saudade was anything but. *Valiant effort*, George thinks, running his hand along the long table before the throne, interrupting the thin layer of dust with jagged lines and mindless spirals. He climbs up the steps towards the throne, letting the ice settle.

The grand door creaks open after a century of minutes, rickety joints shuffling behind Will’s easy stride. A procession of darkness approaches the throne, moving like a superorganism, a cloud of deceit and devastation.

Chairs scrape against the floor, and George feels it in the back of his heart.

Will takes his place next to the throne, eyes flicking through the congregation of staid men, living, breathing institutions. King Charles once described advisers as gemstones wedged in the crown’s gold—hammered in by force, commanding attention, respect, honor.

George’s eyes meet the chandelier. George’s eyes meet Will’s. George’s eyes catch a side door inching open. George’s eyes catch the mask.

Scarred hands unsheath a sword.

Brown eyes glow with understanding.

Ice bleeds through tired veins.

*I answer only to God.*

“You may be wondering why I summoned you,” George begins, allowing his words to freeze in the air, praying the tremble in his voice is merely imagined. “I’ve been speaking with Sir Gould, and have decided to implement some *changes* in our hierarchy. Our structure.”

Disapproving murmurs.

*Traitors.*

“Silence,” he hisses. “It’s my turn to talk.”

Chilling quiet.

*Traitors.*

“Sir Gould and I had a meeting last night,” George spits, letting himself be consumed by burning cold. “In the late hours. I happened upon... Sir Philips, why don’t you share with the court what I happened upon, up in the East wing of offices?”

“Your highness?” Sir Philips croaks.

“Why don’t you stand the *fuck* up, and tell me what I happened upon. *Tell me* what was occurring between my advisers behind my back.”

Philips’ cloudy eyes widen, crows feet stretching to create mangled valleys of flesh.

“Your highness I have no knowledge of-”

“Liar,” George growls. “Stand up, Sir Cambridge.”

A chair scrapes.

*Traitors.*

The king’s eyes seek his knight, seek a moment of comfort.

He finds none.

*Traitor.*

“Majesty,” Cambridge stutters, “I- I, too, have no such knowledge of any out-of-order gatherings.”

“I said nothing about a gathering,” George spits as blood drains from Cambridge’s wrinkled skin. White knuckles grip wooden armrests as the other advisers’ breaths grow louder.

They dare not speak.

“You just signed your death warrant, Cambridge,” George laughs hollowly. “Sir Grey, stand.”

A chair scrapes.

*Traitors.*

George looks to the rafters, asking for guidance, for salvation.

He finds none.

*Traitors.*

“Forgive me, your highness,” Grey whispers. “Forgive me, Lord.”

The coffin seals shut.

“Poor, miserable wretches,” George hisses. “You will hang at dawn.”

*What have I created? Who have I become?*

Panic.

Scarred hands sheath a sword. Scarred hands summon a legion of guards.

A generation dies.

*What have I created? Who have I become?*

—

The frost melts into a gentle spring, nipping and biting despite the flowers that begin to bloom

from the long vines inching up the castle walls.

Stories of deceit, of betrayal and mutiny fly amongst the dimly lit taverns. Stories of twenty necks snapped, old men, respected men, feared men felled by a young king.

And now?

George is *feared*.

George is *fearful*.

“Forgive me, and I will forgive you,” he murmurs as they hang. The men who’d sneak him sweets as a child, the men who cocooned his father in a blanket of statesmanship and distraction after his mother’s death.

Dream’s eyes glow as death sweeps through the gallows—he leads the men to their graves through darkened dungeons out into glaring sunlight. He leads the men through tracks of his congealed blood, never scrubbed from blackstone floors.

People watch.

They hold their breaths.

They turn their eyes to a king with blood on his hands.

They pray to that blood like it’s ambrosia—keeping their beloved king alive for days, months, years, millennia.

George sees their broken necks in his dreams. George sees thousands upon thousands revering him, for what? For violence, for bloodshed, for commands barked in anger and betrayal—no better than a common murderer.

No better than Dream.

And yet, as the days pass, not a single regret crosses the king’s mind—the broken necks grace his dreams rather than plague his nightmares—dreams of valor and strength. The reverence rouses him, no matter what the reason for those bowed heads.

Saudade’s king turns his eyes to battle, and moves onward.

Will, ever the hidden partner, replaces the advisers like clockwork.

And suddenly, *finally*, George’s birthright is his. They meet with generals, with nobles willing to fight, with armies and legions and *supporters*—they bow in reverence, speaking in hushed whispers at the king who, against all odds, answered the call of his divine ordinance.

And suddenly, *finally*, George is a king—truly, powerfully, viciously.

What is a king without his queen?

She stays locked away, growing the future of Saudade within her. She becomes a non-issue. She becomes a ghost. Silent whispers scream—*Do you remember me?*

What is a king without his knight?

George searches for glints of gold wound around nimble fingers, surreptitiously, longingly. Dream

clashes with his king in meetings, causing wars of his own within the castle's very walls. Fire and ice meet in battles that end with George stalking to his chambers and imagining lips of heat dragging down his frozen skin. Battles that end with Dream locating the nearest available barmaid and screwing his eyes shut until George's features appear in the shadows of his mind.

Will notices.

"You're fighting him," Will insists, one night over drinks. "You're fighting him for no reason."

Dream hums softly into his beer, scraping the side of Will's desk.

"Dream," he pushes. "I know what's going on between you two—I'm seemingly the only person in this castle *not* living in a state of absolute oblivion. If you want his attention that badly just—"

"STOP!" Dream roars.

The fire crackles angrily. Blackened wood pops with disdain.

Dream's chest burns.

The jug is set down.

A mask is unfastened.

Will raises his eyebrows in disbelief. George's knight looks almost ashamed.

"Were you expecting me to react like him?" Will murmurs. "Expecting me to get down on one knee and profess my love to you?"

"He didn't profess his love—" Dream growls. "How do you know about—did George tell you?"

"God no, never," Will chuckles. "I will say, though, discreet rendezvous are not George's forte. Discreet emotion isn't yours."

"Fuck. Fuck! I- Nothing's happened in ages, I swear on my mother—"

"No need to swear on your mother," Will says calmly. "Just- keep in mind that he has a wife. And a country. He isn't yours to keep."

"I know that. You don't think I know that?" Dream fumes, gripping the cup with wildfires flickering under his skin.

"I think you know that. But you won't accept it when it's time for things to end—for things to progress. The war is far more important than this, and George's legacy is far more important than you. You have a job, Dream. You have a duty—your duty is to protect, and the closer and closer George gets to the sun, the further you must stray from him. For God's sake, give him a fighting chance to succeed—you- you arguing with him in these council meetings is only making the cause more difficult to defend."

Dream takes a long sip, tilting his head back languidly. The cup is drained.

A clock chimes.

"I'm not going to thank you for showing me your face, if that's what you wanted," Will continues.

"I know," Dream spits.



Boots against stone.

“Did you know he intended to hang them?” Dream accuses.

Will pales. “Traitors are hung,” he says numbly.

“Not these kinds of traitors. These kinds of traitors are imprisoned. You don’t just *kill* respected advisers.”

“Decided to adopt a life of non-violence?” Will snickers soullessly. “George did what was right. Now the citizens respect him—he- he slaughtered the institution, dismantled it from within. He’s better than his father. He’s enacting change.”

“With all due respect, Will, his highness doesn’t know what the *fuck* he’s doing,” Dream hisses.

Will rolls his eyes, raising a glass to cracked lips. “Why won’t you let him fly?”

*Icarus, my Icarus. Come back down to Earth.*

“It’s like you said,” Dream murmurs, standing. “He’s getting closer and closer to the sun.”

“And you’re afraid,” Will whispers, cocking his head. “You’re afraid of burning him.”

Halfway out the door, the knight looks back, scars twisted into a grimace. “I’m afraid,” Dream agrees.

“You’ll hate what I say for far more reasons than one, but might this be love, it will be a love of attrition,” Will says gently. “Remember that.”

Dream nods, pretending the stinging consuming his eyes is a mere product of exhaustion.

The next meeting is one of chilling solemnity.

There is no fire, no biting words, no anger or passion.

The next meeting ends with a truce.

The sun allows the moon to eclipse him entirely—silent poison triumphant over screaming rage—an armistice is reached.

“Dream?” George beckons, glancing at his knight after hours of deliberation. “Do you have anything to add?”

Hearts pound in unison.

Gold bands call out to one another.

Dream rises from his seat, surveying the room with dangerous eyes. He glances down at George, holding eye contact with the king as his fist lands on the table with a resounding thud. They fall silent, quills and parchment shuffling to a halting stop.

“We’re ready,” he spits, voice ablaze with venom. “My half of the army will set out for Elytron as soon as new weapons arrive and lords have been notified. Saudade cannot sustain an attack within its borders—this- this is hardly a land favorable for battle, no, we must bring hell to *their* doorstep.”

Murmurs of assent break out amongst the generals, drifting and circling like shrikes hunting for prey. Will pales, wary eyes shifting to George as heavy fists slam against glossy wood.

The king stands, casting Dream a wary look. “My father- my father lost Elytron,” George starts, steady defiance settling in his bones. “My father let his birthright slip through his fingers. He was duped, betrayed—he was weak. I refuse to fall the way he did. This is not King Henry’s Saudade—this is *my* Saudade. So I agree- I agree with Dream. We’re going to fucking rain *fire*.”

They stand side-by-side—condemned to each other, desperately intertwined despite every rational thought screaming to cut the cord, sever the lifeline.

For George loathed Dream’s torturous Irish goodbyes, popping in and out of home and hearth whenever he pleased. The king was rendered powerless, drowning beneath fragile surfaces—gasping for a few moments of air, of light, of angel hair and paradise eyes.

And Dream abhorred George’s nonchalance, his stubbornness, his unwillingness to *listen*. He hated George’s soft breaths and his loud screams. He hated the way George fought him, with sharp angles and biting words, letting the porcelain, royal exterior obscure his emotions, pushing and pulling and tugging until Dream snapped, until darkness sparked his nerve endings and threatened to burst forth.

Worst of all, Dream hated how a mere doe-eyed look from the king drove him mad. Those brown eyes that gleamed with light and flashed with devilry, the eyes that tracked his every movement, dissected every glance, shift, tremor. Always watching. Always knowing.

Dream turns to look at George, and they share a few moments of reverent, steely silence. Equals. Challengers bound to a singular side—for God, for glory, for country.

The whisper is faint. Secretive. Neither gentle nor harsh, neither tender nor hateful. It’s barely comprehensible, but George feels it rattling in his bones. “Thank you, your highness.”

Dream pulls away, but the fire lingers.

*You are my war club, my weapon for battle—with you I shatter nations, with you I destroy kingdoms.*

## Chapter End Notes

long time, no see, thank you for sticking around <3

songs are time by pink floyd and song of hal by nicholas britell (from the movie "the king"—it's about henry v)

the war club quote is from the bible—jeremiah 51:20.

"poor, miserable wretches" is a direct quote from shakespeare's henry v. he says it to cambridge, grey, and scroop when they're found to be committing treason.

i hope everyone is doing well and staying healthy. take care of yourselves, i'll see you very soon :)

[playlist](#)

as always,  
love from the loglady <3

# Cherry Wine

## Chapter Summary

tw for sexual content and blood

## Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for [notes](#)

Saudade wakes cradled in the arms of spring. Sweet flowers dot the hills in a blizzard of life—primrose blossoms floating through the river, adorning cobblestone streets, falling into the curls of children playing in the fields.

For a moment, it seems peaceful.

Just for a moment.

Locked away in his study, locked away behind overgrown moss and stone brick and centuries of blood and valor, centuries of divine duty, Will knows that fire and ice are about to collide, leaving nothing but destruction in their wake.

The omnipresent shroud of impending war drops a thick, woolen blanket on the beautiful frailty of spring—men stomp through the castle in muddy boots, slamming doors, throwing back beer, table-thumping, and spilling ink. It's a scourge that infects the generals, infects Will, infects George, infects Dream. It turns them inside out—festering darkness surges forth while all remnants of light are locked away.

The days trudge on determinedly. Armies covertly assemble, word is sent in the dead of night to nobles from every corner of Saudade. And as attack grows closer and closer, anxieties rise—the binds that tie are stretched thinner and thinner.

George and Will visit villages with their legion of generals and new advisers. Townspeople bow their heads in silent deference. Wives and mothers and innocent daughters soundlessly mourn deaths that have yet to come.

Nicholas is torn between family and friendship, duty and devotion—somehow, clandestine trainings and visits to the armory are perfectly hidden from Elytron's prince.

"We'll kill him," Will murmurs one day, peering out the window at Nicholas and Karl on an evening walk. "If he gets in the way."

"Karl?" George replies, peeling back curtains to watch them amble to the orchards.

Will hums in confirmation, nails bitten raw scratching at the back of his neck. "Let Nicky keep his pet for now. Once he gets wind of the attack, I expect he'll jump ship—go help his father."

"We could kill him now," George says, unable to recognize the cadence of his own voice. The words come out tinny, detached, like he's hearing himself speak through closed doors.

"True," Will muses, "but we risk losing Nick. It'll destroy him. Better to wait until the war starts.

He's weak. He won't last. He's a boy."

*So are you.*

"They're best friends, Will. Nick thinks of him like a brother," George replies cautiously. Meticulously rehearsed, spewing practiced empathy.

"And he should know better than to form frivolous attachments during wartime," Will states. George can't help but nod his head in assent.

They stand for many torturous moments, watching their brother, their blood, walk deeper and deeper into the trees. Deeper and deeper into darkness. Somehow, George finds comfort in Will's ruthlessness, his nonchalance, the way his eyes trace over every fracture in the landscape, the way his features reveal no filial ties to the young knight. He needs this—needs to be cold, to detach, to discuss strategy without flashes of emerald dancing behind his eyes. To plan an attack without thinking of Nicholas—his brother, his blood—marred by the scourge of war, understanding what it feels like to destroy and be destroyed.

Dream is condemned to nights of wandering—through hallways and passageways and stone arches and cobbled staircases. It's inexplicable. Their plans fall seamlessly into place, an attack of massive proportions, of brilliance, of glory, is planned in shrouded night, and yet, Dream is horrifyingly incomplete.

Horribly alone.

It's a suicide mission for some, Dream knows that. And somehow, he's okay with that. Okay with being the underdog, with fighting tooth and nail, emerging covered in blood and filth. Perhaps not emerging at all.

His head hits the pillow. His heartbeat slows. His eyes flutter shut and the stars sing him to sleep.

But he remembers George—George's hair splayed out on his pillowcase, George's heartbeat syncing with his. George's eyes, questioning and wandering and wanting, begging and pleading and loving. George's eyes seeking Dream out in the darkest of nights.

And he bolts awake, jolts to life.

Refuses to succumb.

Dream wonders if George keeps a place for him, leaves a portion of his bedspread untouched, smooths it down flat. He wonders if George reaches out in the middle of the night, grasping at air instead of a warm body, chest rising and falling. He wonders if George imagines tracing his bones with soft fingers and sharp nails.

It's a dull ache. The strange twist whenever George grasps Katerina's hand, smiles for the crowds, waves robotically. Dream calls for his king, silently, angrily. Calls for him with blazing eyes and vicious looks. In meetings, when the generals shout and rant and demand more demand blood demand death, George stares ahead staidly, twisting his gold, round and round and round, like enough friction will burn him, carve Dream deep into his skin. Dream watches delicate fingers dance around, teasing him, answering his call.

*Icarus?*

Time flows superfluously. Arrangements are made, blacksmiths pound away at weaponry. Dream sits in their cramped quarters, beer in one hand, dagger in the other. Watches slayers of men crafted

from mere scraps of metal. Widowmakers shaped by calloused fingers.

And one day, Will enters. Sidesteps the blacksmiths, makes a beeline for Dream's post on a rickety stool at the back of the workshop. Dream can feel a layer of grime starting to settle on his hands, his clothes. He wonders if, in another life, he'd stumble into the king's bathroom once more, wonders if George would wash him clean, wash him pure.

Disloyal thoughts are banished by Will's pained grimace.

"What is it?" Dream grumbles.

"I was thinking," Will begins, "Elytron's got some allies. We're outnumbered. Almost horrifyingly so."

*We'll fucking win.*

"Correct."

"The plan's fucking brilliant, but even if we win, we'll lose thousands," he says, a little sadly, a little resignedly. "Many of us won't come back."

Dream takes a swig. Studies darkened features. Sees an uncharacteristic softness in honeycomb eyes. "What are you saying?"

"I want to marry Nathalie. Now. Soon. Before we leave."

"Alright," Dream exhales. "What do you need?"

"A date. We need a date for the launch of our attack, so I can make arrangements."

"We cannot attack until we secure the heir, you know this," Dream mutters, swirling the dregs of his drink round and round. "Until Geo- the king's child is born, we cannot attack."

Will counts his fingers. "She'll be due in early June, I suppose," he muses.

Dream shakes his head slightly. Thinks about George. George as a father. George caring for a child. Perfect family, perfectly complete.

"June twenty-fifth. We'll leave then," the knight declares. "That child must be secure before we depart. If the king- if George dies- he *needs* an heir. Or all of this will be for nothing. It'll all go to Albert."

Will nods solemnly. "I know, Dream. I'll alert the generals-"

"Excellent."

"Dream-" he starts.

Dream's eyes squeeze shut. "Not now."

Will turns to leave, turning back to watch Dream's broken form, hunched over fires of creation, sparks of life being breathed into gleaming metal.

"Will?" Dream calls after a moment.

"Hmm?"

“Good luck.”

“Thank you,” he breathes. “Thank you.”

Will tells his king and queen the next day, declares his intent to marry, seeks the blessing of his sovereign.

Katerina’s eyes shine with tears.

George barely hides his grimace.

“I know why you’re doing this,” he whispers to his brother, his blood. “I know why you’re doing this and you don’t need to. You’re not dying.”

Will stiffens. “I loved her long before this war ate away at us. Consumed us. I’ll love her long after.”

“Will-” George breathes.

“If I die, I want our love to be true in the eyes of God. I want my soul to find her, in this life and the next.”

George sighs. Scrapes his feet against the carpet. “Must love be seen by God, acknowledged by Him, in order to be true?”

Will’s eyes narrow. He studies George’s face for a long moment, letting the sound of candles crackling drown out the king’s unspoken declaration. His silent scream.

*Please understand. Please. Please. Please.*

“I don’t know,” Will murmurs. “Regardless, I- I want to do this. I want to be married.”

“You can’t die, Will,” George says, voice smaller than a king. Too small.

“Don’t worry, your highness,” Will says with a sad smile, “as long as you’re alive, I’ll be here, nagging you.”

“I hope you mean that.”

“I do.”

They break apart. Retreat to their separate chambers. It feels like a goodbye.

—

Will proposes to Nathalie in the same room they’d slept in as teenagers. She kisses him deeply before looking at him, eyes brimming with joy and something indiscernible, something sadder. She understands, and loves him all the same.

—

The abbey was reserved for weddings of the immediate royal family. George pestered the archbishop for days, weeks, to no avail. Nathalie’s father found a rickety church on the outskirts of town, nestled in the heart of the hills, surrounded by glittering tributaries from Saudade’s great river. Thick vines crept up the walls determinedly, boring into cracks in the foundation, offering blossoms to pepper the aged stone. The bridesmaids titter around, fiddling with Nathalie’s veil with

nimble fingers.

George and Will had sat in the back recesses of the church, sipping at strong whiskey from a small flask wrapped in leather.

Because Will had no family, other than George.

He had no blood, other than George.

The king could hardly bring himself to face his loyal secretary, much less offer words of encouragement. Because a wedding was meant to be driven by love—the wedding Will and Nathalie deserved was driven by love, and longing, and hope, and the prospect of decades to come. But the wedding they received was a matrimony of desperation, a last-ditch effort to be tied by the hands of God before the men of Saudade plunged into deepest night.

“This is what you want, Will?” George mumbled, watching a beetle scuttle into a dark corner.

“This is what I want,” Will replied gruffly.

Minutes passed in tense silence until Nick burst through the doors. “They’re ready for you.”

Nathalie grips her father’s arm like a vice as she makes her way down the aisle, never taking her eyes off Will. The small gathering of guests gasp at the bride-to-be, adorned with white roses, glittering in silk. George remembers his wedding, remembers how Katerina was nothing but a scared child, how he felt the sting of Dream’s touch as he pushed a meaningless wedding band onto his wife’s thin fingers, how he laid his bride down in silken sheets. How he made love softly, gently, the right way, but still yearned to be *broken*, be *hurt*, yearned to feel Dream’s teeth scraping against his raw skin, Dream’s hands searching for his soul in depths he had yet to conquer himself.

And when Nathalie arrives at the altar, her cheeks shine with the soft light gleaming through stained glass windows, reflecting silver tears that run, run, run onto white fabric. George stands next to Nick and across from Katerina, best man mirroring maid of honor. The queen is a vision in glittering crimson, letting fat tears flow freely down painted cheeks.

The vows begin as Nathalie’s father looks on with gentle pride. George feels sick watching his crow’s feet deepen. Feels sick watching him give a daughter away to a honeymoon of war.

Reality hits like a sucker-punch. Fells them like the sharpest sword.

George barely registers Nathalie’s sweet words as his eyes find Dream’s, obedient knight stationed at the back of the church. Dream’s knuckles whiten, gold ring sliding roughly against twinkling emeralds. George looks at Will, then back at Dream.

“I have loved you since the day I found you in the street,” Nathalie laughs. “I will love you every day for the rest of our lives.”

The corner of Dream’s mouth quirks up in a small smile. George swallows roughly. An unbidden image of Dream staring up from between his king’s legs occludes George’s mind.

“Nathalie,” Will starts, wiping a stray tear. “I scribble notes to you in the margins of every novel I read, I search for you in inked letters and yellowed pages. You write me your fantasies and I promise I will twist myself misshapen to fulfill them for you. You are my beloved author, my guidance, my steadfast light in shrouds of darkness, and, my dear, I know in my heart of hearts that I can only love you more—in this life and the next.”



George's stomach lurches while Dream's heart thuds against his ribcage. Beats so loud he's certain the rest of the knights can hear it.

The priest clears his throat. "Do you, William Abel Gould, take this woman to be your wedded wife?"

"I do."

They exchange rings, and a cheer breaks out among the guests—a stark contrast to the ceremonious sterility of royal matrimonium. Because George's wedding was a mere junction of power—no handwritten vows, no kissing the bride. No tears of joy, rather, tears of bereavement as they mourned the selves they once knew.

Nathalie and Will burst from the church arm-in-arm, wedding party in tow, bathed in sunlight, blessed by the clang of olden bells.

"I pray your marriage is happier than mine," Katerina whispers, pressing a small leather pouch into Nathalie's hands. "I pray love surrounds you, holds you. I pray for your peace."

"Thank you," Nathalie replies, kissing her cheek. "Kate I—"

"*Good luck*, Nathalie," Katerina interrupts. "I mean that."

"Same to you, your highness."

"Drinks!" Will yells semi-coherently, scooping his bride into his arms. "Nathalie's inn!"

George finds his queen as she's helped by Nick into a waiting carriage, cradling her stomach like a vice. Katerina blinks rapidly, almost as if trying to clear her vision, then averts her gaze.

"Your highness," Dream says, arriving out of nowhere. "A quick word?"

"What is it?" George snaps.

Dream throws him a self-satisfied smirk. George's fingers tremble. "A word."

"A-alright," he mutters, stepping back into the church. The door slams shut behind them, reverberating off decrepit stone.

Their hands brush as Dream sets off, and George clenches his fist, willing the fire away.

"We haven't got the best track record with churches," Dream chuckles, marching towards the back chambers.

"Or weddings," George mutters, running his hands against stone pillars.

Door after door clicks shut until it's just them. Alone. Hidden in some kind of study, amid stuffy couches and dusty bookshelves and old mirrors and ancient paintings.

And suddenly, Dream looks nervous, uncertain, reveals cracks in porcelain armor. The mask is discarded, and George doesn't know who moves first, but they collide, hands trembling, eyes ablaze.

"We can't!" George gasps, pushing Dream away just as his knight's tongue begins to swipe over his lips. "Dream, *no*."

Dream cards a hand through mussed hair, a crazed look in his eyes. “You can’t refuse me. You’re *weak*. You haven’t been touched in fucking months, have you?”

“I- I’m not weak,” George says slowly, unable to meet Dream’s piercing, bitter gaze. He’s almost cowering—overpowered, overruled, blood running cold—he doesn’t know if it’s seconds or minutes or hours or centuries that pass before Dream dives in again, finding George’s lips like a lost possession.

“Do you get jealous? When I fuck common whores right under your nose?” Lips dripping with spit, Dream begins his attack and subsequent destruction, biting and sucking at George’s neck like a man possessed.

“Fuck you,” George manages, grabbing at Dream’s hair to force their lips together once more, licking into the warmth. “I hate you, you know that? You’re driving me mad. *Fuck you*. I wish I’d fucking executed you.”

“I think of you,” Dream whispers, licking just below George’s ear. “I think of you when I’m inside them. I think of how tight you are, despite being such a slut. I miss how you feel around me, miss how you taste. Miss your little hands.”

George moans, bucking his hips up into nothing. “You stupid fucking whore,” Dream spits, grabbing a handful of George’s hair. “Look at yourself.”

Dream wrenches George’s head around to glance in the dirty mirror, eyes tracing George’s bloody necklace, marks of fire and passion, devotion and possession, knight’s hungry expression reflected behind his king’s trembling frame.

Something hard presses into George’s stomach. “Fuck,” he mutters, “s’ that you?”

Dream reaches down between them and unsheathes a dagger, emeralds encrusted on the hilt. “Not quite,” he grins, guiding the blade to caress George’s neck.

They share a breath, two, three. George gazes into eyes of blooming forests and cocks his head, stunned into defiant silence.

*Do it.*

Dream presses down, watching with depraved fascination as droplets of crimson begin to taint porcelain skin, drip, drip, dripping down onto the stone floor.

A small part of him wants to press down harder.

A small part of him thinks George would let him.

“I could kill you right now, you know that, right?” Dream laughs sadistically. “You love it. You love being at my mercy. You love when I’m your God.”

George lets out a sharp exhale, rolling his eyes.

Dream raises his other hand to George’s cheek, letting a resounding *smack* sound through the room. “Say it,” he hisses. “Say I’m your God.”

*Worship me.*

“No.”

Another slap.

“You like it when I hurt you, don’t you George? *Say it*, and I’ll give you what you want.”

“You-you’re my God, Dream,” George whispers, relishing the pain. It sends sparks to the pit of his stomach, sends his mind into a frenzy of want.

Dream’s smile grows wicked. “Do you remember the first time we met, Georgie? Remember how you sliced me open?” he murmurs. “It was the first scar you gave me. I want us to match now.”

It’s over in a second. Dream deftly slides the knife against the soft flesh under George’s chin, slicing in one fluid motion. George winces at the pain, letting out a breath that he didn’t know he’d been holding. “*Fuck*,” George whimpers, feeling a trickle of blood slide down his neck. “Dream.”

“Open your mouth,” Dream says. George obeys instantly. “Good boy, you don’t even fight me anymore.” The knight slides the flat edge of his knife along the tip of George’s tongue, letting the taste of iron and steel linger. And when Dream kisses his king, he makes sure to savor it.

Dream cuts George’s shirt open effortlessly. Dream admires his handiwork. And Dream gets on his fucking knees. George watches with wide eyes, secretly hoping they bruise deep purple. The king’s hands tug at blonde curls, grown so long they spill onto Dream’s shoulders. And Dream fucking *whines*.

George is heavy and bitter on his tongue and Dream sucks like his life depends on it. Licks like he’ll die without it. Lets himself choke, lets himself gag, lets himself be dragged through hell. Lets himself *serve*.

When Dream’s merciless fingers push into George, the king lets out a gasp that shakes the rafters. George’s knight kisses him with lawless abandon. Gently. Roughly.

Dream fucks George, fucks him rough for all the months of torture, fucks him gentle for all the months of longing. Makes sure to press their hearts together, makes sure George watches in the mirror, so they’re both forced to remember every scar and bruise, every scratch, every bite, every kiss.

George feels himself breaking around Dream, feels his heart shatter with every stroke.

They hold each other after, grasping at skin like they’ve memorized each other for millennia. It’s not loving, George argues with himself. It’s not love. Dream trembles under George’s heartbeat.

“I want more,” George whispers angrily. “I wish we had more.”

“Then take more,” Dream answers with numbing honesty.

George sits up, allowing his knight a full view—the knobs of his spine, the bend of his ribs, the curve of his shoulders. Dream’s hands twitch involuntarily, begging, pleading.

“You make me sick,” George confesses. “I feel physically ill around you. My head’s splitting open and everything aches and my chest feels like it’s going to fucking combust.”

“You’re married, George,” Dream says matter-of-factly. “It’s called having a conscience.”

“I never had one before you.”

It’s victory enough to watch the flicker of softness cross Dream’s features.

They're too caught up, too obsessed, fallen too hard to notice the unwelcome voyeur caught, rooted to the spot. She stands—a diving woman cast from heaven, big blue eyes peering out from a crack in the doorway. Big blue eyes welling with tears—*staring, staring, staring*.

## Chapter End Notes

songs are cherry wine, angel of small death and the codeine scene, and champagne problems.

i call katerina a diving woman at the end of the chapter, look up the diving women of jeju-do and the ama pearl divers. for some reason, i feel like katerina would be a diving woman, in another life.

thanks to saint, agora, and nico for reading it over. thank you kai and alyssa for the motivation and love :)

and thank you all for sticking with me.

[playlist](#)

love from the loglady <3

# Blood of Eden

## Chapter Summary

tw for sexual content, poorly negotiated kinks, bad sexual practices, dub-con, lots of blood, and death. the sex scene in this chapter is not safe, sane, and consensual. what dream and george say/do while they're having sex is a horrible way to act towards your partner. please please please skip it if this can be triggering for you. dream and george are not good people in this fic. please keep this in mind.

## Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for [notes](#)

Katerina catches a glimpse of herself in the mirror. Ornate, curled gold, atop a dark wooden dressing table with too many drawers. So many trinkets stuffed away, hidden in dark corners and bathed in dust. Hairbrushes, compacts, stray earrings. She wonders who the previous owner was. She wonders if they looked at themselves the way she does now. With scorn. With pity. With rage.

Because the shadows under her eyes are stained with black mulberries, her hands are trembling, and all the tears have dried, scarring spectral cheeks with their subtle taunts.

She knows. She knows.

---

Something flips, the tide turns.

It's like an addiction. They go about their lives, perform their duties. But somehow, somehow, there exists a small corner of George's mind that allows him to think of nothing but Dream. That wills him to go through the motions in search of his next fix. The hatred melts into lust, and the lust melts into something darker, something scarier, something they're not quite ready to admit.

And suddenly, suddenly, their meetings are not-so-secret. Suddenly, suddenly, it becomes twice a day, once at night. Suddenly, suddenly, Dream is pulling George into dark corners and getting on his knees. Or pushing George down onto his. Or they sprint up to Dream's chambers to rip at each other's clothes, each other's skin, each other's hearts and minds and souls.

Suddenly, suddenly, George realizes the ache of Dream buried within him is perpetual. Eternal.

A few days pass after the wedding, and they're in a rhythm.

Fight. Kiss. Fuck. Cum. Dissemble. A never-ending loop.

George is settled in Dream's lap, grinding against his leg as they kiss, so so so slowly, without a hint of hatred. It's fucking terrifying, the way the lips and teeth that vow to maim George can worship him so devotedly. It's fucking maddening, the way George disintegrates under Dream's touch, the way his lungs fill with water whenever Dream's lips find his.

George pulls at Dream's hair savagely, and the knight moans into their kiss, nibbling at his king's lips in warning. There's a look in George's eyes that Dream can't quite place, a hunger he isn't

accustomed to. And there's a fire in George's veins that he can't extinguish, no matter how hard he tries.

George feels it bubble up inside him.

George feels not-quite-in-control.

George wants to hurt Dream.

George wants Dream to *beg* to be hurt.

"I was thinking," George whispers, sucking at Dream's collarbone. "I want to do something different."

Dream's hands drift down to George's waist, guiding him effortlessly. They move in sync. Lock and key. George's stomach twists as his cock strains against his pants.

"Different?"

"You don't respect me," George says, wrapping his fingers around Dream's neck.

"Correct," Dream growls.

George presses down until he feels the blood pulsing in Dream's veins. "I'd like to change that."

Dream suppresses a moan, gasping for air as George's grip grows tighter. "You?"

"What, you think I can't handle it? Have you forgotten I'm your king?" George breathes, rocking back and forth, back and forth, grinding against Dream's thigh.

"No, George, I haven't forgotten. I just think you're *weak*," Dream hisses. "In every aspect."

"Hmm?" George hums, feeling himself lose control, feeling the haze settle over his mind.

"Look at you," Dream murmurs roughly. "You're getting off against my fucking thigh. Riding it like a bitch."

"Look at you," George teases. "Pretending that you still hate me."

"I do hate you." Dream retorts, slipping his fingers under the hem of George's shirt. But he's not spitting acid. He's *not*.

George forces their lips together.

George tightens his grip.

George squeezes harder, harder than he should.

The tension is unforgiving and the ice that courses through George's veins threatens to fell Dream. But Dream thinks it would be a privilege. Dream thinks he would be *lucky* to die by George's hand.

"George- I can't breathe," he gasps, barely panicking.

"I don't care."

George watches Dream's face go pale, watches him gasp and struggle, fight to live. A match

strikes in George's bones, grows and grows, feeds and feeds until he's being swallowed up by the sun. When Dream's eyes start blurring out of focus, George lets him go, branding his knight with red fingerprints.

Dream raises a shaking hand to his neck, rubbing at the bruises over and over. "Fuck," he breathes. And George almost thinks he's gone too far, almost begins to mutter a "*sorry, I don't know what got into me,*" until Dream grabs a fistful of his hair and growls into his ear. "Keep going, little king. Keep going and watch what happens."

George kisses him, sweetly, softly. Kisses him so achingly slow. "Okay," he says, running his lips over every inch of Dream's abused neck. "Take your clothes off, Dream."

Dream doesn't know what possesses him, but he obeys.

The shift is so easy. George falls into his role like it's second nature. It scares Dream.

It makes him want *more*.

George leans back onto the headboard, shirtless with his legs spread, and watches his knight undress. A small golden cross hangs on Dream's neck, glaring at George, daring George.

"Get on the floor," George says sharply. "On your knees."

Dream doesn't think he's ever felt more humiliated. But he obeys.

He obeys.

"Get yourself off."

"Fuck no-" Dream begins to protest.

*"Get yourself off."*

Dream rolls his eyes and spits into his hand. He starts slowly, teasing himself, teasing George. He runs his hand down his cock with light fingers, moving his wrist deftly.

"Faster," George says, sliding his pants off in one fluid motion. Dream moves his hands faster and faster, trying to bite back any noise until it's far too much to bear. Green eyes widen. Brown eyes narrow. George almost looks bored, watching Dream moaning and shaking and whimpering until- "Fuck- George- I'm-"

"Stop," George commands.

Dream nearly collapses. "Fuck you," he mutters breathlessly, feeling his knees start to bruise against the stone floor.

"Don't speak unless you're spoken to, Dream," George smiles wickedly. Dream sinks back onto the floor, achingly hard and trembling from head to toe. "Do it again."

Dream starts all over again, fucking into his hand, watching as George begins to undress.

"You look fucking heavenly," George moans, swiping a bead of precum with his thumb.

"Suck- suck on your fingers," Dream gasps.

George cocks his head. "Do you think you're in a position to make requests?"

"Please, George, I wanna see you suck on your fingers. Please, wanna see you taste yourself," Dream whimpers helplessly.

"Fuck," George groans. "Okay, Dreamie, since you asked nicely."

George laps at his fingers, then spreads his legs. "Dream," he taunts. "*Watch me.*"

Dream watches George's finger move in and out, in and out, and he feels fucking breathless.

"George," Dream cries. "I need to- I need to cum- please-"

"Stop," George orders.

Dream feels tears prick at his eyes.

"Wanna come up here?" George motions, patting the mattress with his free hand.

"Yes," Dream sighs. "Please."

Dream stumbles towards George, so hard it *hurts*, leaking against his stomach as he sits down onto the bed. "Can- can you ride me?" he whispers.

George smiles wickedly, already working another finger into himself. "Alright," he grins. "Since you behaved."

They line their bodies up, and George sinks down, letting out a moan when the ache is almost too much to handle. Dream presses their foreheads together and savors the tightness, the warmth. Something about seeing George with his eyes fluttering shut, lips dripping with spit, rocking back and forth on Dream's lap sends him over the edge. Dream forgets it all, forgets everything about George being in charge, forgets about being an obedient little boy. Something inside him roars to life, something inside him wants *revenge* for the darkening marks on his neck, *revenge* for having to fuck into his hand like a teenager.

One hand finds George's throat, the other finds his waist. Something horrific begins to fester in his heart, that sickening urge to destroy. It's a tangible shift, withering as an east wind. And George drops the act. George looks *terrified*.

"You're going to take my cock until you can't breathe," Dream hisses, flipping them over, slamming George into the mattress. "I'm going to kill you, George, I'm going to fuck the life right out of you, send you straight back to hell."

George writhes under him, unable to speak, watching the cross around Dream's neck swing back and forth, back and forth.

"And," Dream growls, spitting into George's open mouth, "I still don't respect you."

Dream fucks George until they're both spent, cumming over and over again, messy and violent and fucking merciless. And when it's over, finally over, George collapses into his arms. Dream cleans him up gently, with gentle touches and soft kisses to reddened flesh. The bed dips with the weight of the world, and George presses their hearts together until the thudding stops. Until it's a gentle ebb and flow. Dream tangles his hands in George's hair, combing it out in silent surrender.

"Didn't know you believed in this," George murmurs softly, catching the tiny gold cross dangling from Dream's neck. He lets the chain run through his fingers. Tugs Dream closer.



“I don’t, really,” Dream says. “I- I went to the abbey- the archbishop saw me. Gave me the chain.”

“You were praying? For the war?”

Dream averts his eyes, curses George’s gaze. He looks so *sweet* . So *angelic*, splayed out with cotton-candy clouds dusting across his cheeks. Dream watches George’s chest rise and fall, watches his ribs move under pale skin, illuminated by dying sunlight.

“No- I-,” Dream stutters.

George stiffens. “What did you pray for?” he insists. Dream’s blood runs cold. His lips move before his brain gets a chance to scream *stop!*

“I asked God- I asked God to teach me- *forget it*. I wasn’t- I’m not thinking straight. You’ve fucked me out.”

“Fucking *say it*, Dream,” George commands.

Dream’s eyes lose their warmth. He brings his lips to George’s ear and whispers, so, so, so softly.

“I asked God to teach me how to love you.”

George’s chest collapses. With shaking, numbed fingers, he slowly lifts the chain off Dream’s neck and places it on his own. Dream averts his gaze until George’s fingers grip his hair, wrench his neck backwards, force him to face his king.

“Fuck me again,” George says, pressing his ear to Dream’s heart. Not begging. Not pleading. George eases himself onto the mattress and commands: “Fuck me, Clay.”

“George- we- are you sure?”

“*Please*,” George whispers as tears pool in his eyes.

Dream fits his thumbs into the dimples at the base of George’s spine and pushes in slowly. Grabs the chain, pulls it *hard*. Pulls it so George can’t forget.

They’re a superposition and they’re not in love.

They’re not in love.

*They’re not in love.*

George returns to his chambers with the familiar post-sex haze, but a dark pit in his stomach nagging, nagging.

The door is bolted shut. He tugs at it until he hears a blood-curdling scream from within the room. He tugs harder.

“Kate?” George yells.

A red-faced nurse comes bustling out the doorway, sending George flying backwards.

“Oh! Your highness,” she says with a quick curtsy. “My apologies.”

“Yes, it’s fine,” George mumbles, “is she? Er-”

A toothy grin spreads across the nurse's face. "She's still going, but everything seems to be in order! Just wait out here and we'll come fetch you when everything's all over."

George gives her a quick nod, turns on his heel, and runs like mad to Will's study. He jolts when George flings the door open, hastily flipping over a stack of parchment.

"Katerina's- um- she's-," George stutters.

"Baby?" Will asks.

"Ah- yes. I was wondering if you'd wait with me. Y'know. Outside."

"Oh!" Will exclaims frantically. "Y- yes. Let me fetch drinks."

They sit outside the bedchamber, sipping whiskey. Ten minutes pass. Twenty.

Footsteps. George knows those footsteps. Dream appears at the end of the hallway, illuminated by candlelight. The cross cauterizes George's flesh. He tucks it into his shirt with trembling fingers.

"Christ," Will mutters under his breath, motioning to a servant for another glass.

They sit shoulder-to-shoulder on a plush red sofa. Dream looks at George. Will looks at Dream. George wishes the Earth would crack open and swallow him whole.

"So- er- am I going to be the godfather then?" Will chuckles after a decade of silence.

"Hm? Oh, yes, 'course," George stutters. "Haven't talked to her about it but I'm sure she'd love for you and Nathalie to... Yes- of course."

Dream smirks. George studies the floor. Will lets out a deep sigh.

"And- and how are you two..." he begins.

"No," Dream declares, draining his glass.

"Drop it, Will," George commands.

The nurse emerges with a wide smile. "It's a *girl*," she whispers joyously. "Congratulations, your highness."

Will claps George on the back. He barely registers it. George's heart pumps loud, loud, louder in his ears.

"Thank you," George says. He means it. "*Thank you*. Can I- um- can I see her?"

"Of course, everything's cleaned up and in order," the nurse answers, holding the door open.

When George looks back, Dream is gone.

—

"We must name her," Katerina says happily, rocking the baby in her arms. "Name her now and christen her in a few days."

Her cheeks are flushed pink and she's practically glowing, but George recognizes the shadows under her eyes. Sees her grip instinctively tighten around the child whenever he nears.

"I want her name to be Astraea," Katerina declares.

"That's- tradition says she must be named after a former queen."

"She's my child," Katerina says. "I wish to choose her name."

"She's our child," George mutters.

"She's *my* child," Katerina says calmly. "I carried her. I gave her life. You fucked off for nine months and left me locked up in here. *My decision.*"

"Alright," George says softly. "Your decision."

"Astraea Anastasia," she coos, stroking the child's cheek with her thumb.

"It's lovely. Truly," George whispers, planting a kiss on Katerina's head. He pretends to ignore her flinch. Pretends like he's not shaking when he picks up his child. George runs his thumb across the crown of Astraea's head, feeling the soft tufts of dark hair. She wriggles around happily,

George hands Astraea to the nurse. "She'll sleep in the nursery tonight," the nurse says gently. "I'll be awake with her all night. Get some rest, your highnesses."

"Thank you," Katerina says.

"Can I sleep here tonight?" George mumbles when the nurse departs.

Katerina looks at him with a mixture of curiosity and disgust, cocking her head to the side.

"If you must," she whispers, settling into the covers.

—

George wakes up bathed in blood. Hot, sticky blood. It's everywhere, gushing and flowing and staining the sheets. Splattered over the pillows. He raises his fingers up, closer to his face, so he can see, so he can be *sure*. It's warm. So warm. And the sheer horror of it all is enough for George to forget that this blood has to belong to someone. He starts frantically patting himself down, searching for an invisible wound. *Not my blood.*

And then it hits.

Katerina is coughing, convulsing. It's flowing out of her nose and her ears and her mouth. There's a red stain on the sheets that's growing by the second. "George," she gasps, a strange gurgling sound, "George, George."

George can't do anything, he can't see anything but this blood, everywhere, and he's ripping sheets from the bed to try and stop the bleeding, screaming out for a guard, anything, anyone, but nobody's coming and it's just *blood*.

"Stop," she wheezes, "stop. I don't-"

"Kate, please," he cries. "What's happened? What's happening?"

All he sees is red, red, red. Viscous red, blurring his vision and eating his wife alive.

"*Help!*" he screams. "*Guard!*"

A guard flings open their door. “Your majesty?” he says frantically.

“Get a fucking doctor!” George yells, “go!”

“*George!*” Katerina screams. “Where are you?”

“I’m here,” George gasps, clenching her hands in his. “Can’t you see me?”

She lets out a crazed, wheezing laugh as blood pools in her throat. “I can’t see *anything*.”

His heart pounds faster and faster, so hard he’s sure it’ll explode. And suddenly, George is a child again and the blood belongs to the previous queen of Saudade. Suddenly, George realizes *he’s been here before*.

“God,” Katerina sobs, “I can’t leave my baby. Astraea, Astraea, she’ll be alone.”

“You’re not fucking dying,” George hisses, feeling tears slide down his cheeks. “You-”

“Take care of her. Please, George, make this right. Make sure she knows her mum loved her. Loves her,” Katerina gasps, gripping his hands. The blood is slowing down, soaking into the mattress. George feels his chest tighten, feels his blood freeze.

“Kate, please don’t,” George sobs. “You can’t die.”

“I’m not scared,” she whispers, smiling through bloodied teeth. “I’m not scared anymore.”

“*I’m scared*,” George pleads, “Kate, the doctor’s coming, *please*.”

She opens her eyes, dizzy and unfocused, and George thinks that even like this, even with life flowing out of her, she’s still regal as ever. Pure as ever. “You can’t- you can’t beg me to live. You *can’t*. Not after what you’ve done. I know everything, George,” she spits. “I know why you could never love me. I know about the war, I know *everything*. All I ask, all I want from you, is to spare Karl. When you get there, if- if you win, kill my father, but spare my brother. This is his fault—this marriage was his doing. *Promise me you’ll kill my father*. ”

“I’m sorry,” George cries. “I’m so sorry. I tried, I swear I tried. I’m sorry.”

“*Promise me!*” she screams.

“I promise, I promise,” George sobs.

“You don’t get to feel sorry for yourself,” she murmurs. “You don’t. Take care of our daughter, please. Don’t cast her aside. She is your future, George. And- and- if you love Dream. If you love him, tell him. I- I don’t know much about you, but I know what I saw. I saw a love I yearned to have with you. You must tell him.”

George tucks his hands under Katerina, lifting her to his chest, and she slumps into him. Blood begins dripping from her mouth, and the mattress is drenched and his shirt is drenched and she’s drenched and the whole room is a sickening shade of red. “I want to hate you. I almost do. But I have forgiven you,” she says with a rattling breath. “You are the father of my child, so I forgive you. But I don’t know if God will.”

The blood stops trickling. The blood stops altogether. He hears one, two, three rattling breaths. And then she’s still.

He can’t move. He doesn’t know if it’s ten minutes or thirty or an eternity. Her head is on his

shoulder, their hearts are pressed together. One is beating, one isn't. And when he finally lays her down, closes her eyes, George brings blood stained fingertips to his face and touches the tears slipping down his cheeks.

As if possessed, George stumbles from the room, and Will, Nathalie, and Nick are bounding down the hallway just as the door heaves shut.

"George," Will says breathlessly. "We saw- we saw the guard running for the doctor- we- what happened?"

Nathalie's already crying, silently, trembling as the sick, sick realization hits. And hits. And hits again.

"She's- she-," George says numbly, feeling the blood-soaked shirt stick to his skin. "I think she's dead." He studies the carpet as Nathalie lets out a gasp.

Will stumbles backwards, catching the wall. "What?" he murmurs. "What? How did she- what?" He turns to Nathalie. She grabs his arm like a vice.

George hears his own voice coming from far, far away. "I woke up in blood," he says blankly. "I woke up and she- all this blood- I don't know how-"

And

something

*snaps.*

Nathalie looks at George with fire and ash clouding her gaze, like he'd driven a knife into Katerina's heart. Like he'd sliced her open mercilessly, willed the blood from her veins, willed her heart to stop beating. Willed his child motherless. The gray wasteland of her stare is enough for him to cast a silent prayer to the heavens, begging God to be merciful, to take him instead.

Nick breaks the silence, stuttering out, "I'm sorry, I need to... *Karl*," and flees. His footsteps echo down the grand staircase, growing quieter and quieter and disappearing altogether.

"Nathalie," Dream's voice comes, quiet yet firm. *When did you get here?* "We need to get her cleaned up. I can send for her ladies..."

George looks at his knight, digging raw nails into his palms until he feels his blood mix with his wife's.

"No, no, Dream, I'll do it," Nathalie says shakily, smoothing down her dress. "Thank you."

She disappears into the bedroom as blood continues to drip down George's arms, down, down, onto the carpet. Continues to drip, and drip, and it's fucking deafening.

"Dream will you- will you take him?" Will says after a moment. *Who? Take who?* "I need to go talk to the council, the generals. We need to send word to Albert. He's going to want to come to the funeral and we have armies assembling, oh God, I need to..."

"Go," Dream rumbles. "I'll take him."

And George thinks it must be some sick, sick joke that the doctor arrives at that very moment, bounding up the stairs. "Your majesty," he begins breathlessly, "I- Christ-"

Dream's grip on George's arm tightens. *When did that happen?* "You need to leave," Dream says slowly. Painfully. "You were too late. Do you hear me? *You were too fucking late.*"

*Take who? Take who?*

And then George realizes he's being taken, he's being dragged up to the stone tower, he's being undressed by Dream and helped into a tub. The dried blood is flaking off George's skin, and the water turns a sickening pink color as Dream runs his finger down George's spine. The knight washes his king clean, scrubs all the evidence away.

George lays down in Dream's bed, shivering and half-catatonic.

"I killed her," George whispers.

"What was that?" Dream says softly. "What'd you say?"

"My fault," George's voice breaks. "I killed her."

"Shh," Dream says, laying down next to him. "I know, I know."

It is enough. It is enough. Dream's arms, strong and lean and crushing the air from George's lungs. Compressing his ribs. Gracing his skin. George hears Dream's heartbeat through his chest. George smells single-malt whiskey and mint. It is enough. It is enough.

It isn't enough.

George sinks into nightmares plagued with rivers of blood and endless death. His hands are stained, no matter how hard he scrubs them. The funeral is planned quickly. Astraea is rocked to sleep by nurses and a father who can barely attend to himself, let alone a child. Will assures George that the plans are hidden, that the generals and nobles and armies have been alerted of Albert's presence.

The mourning citizens gather outside the abbey on the day of the funeral, leaving bouquets on the grass and small teardrops on the cobblestone. Albert stands alone, a blank expression on his face. Karl slumps against Nick, silent tears streaming down his cheeks. The orchestra plays something somber, something nostalgic. George steps forward to place flowers on her coffin and catches Albert's eye.

Those sour, rancid lips quirk up. Just a bit. The corner of his mouth curls. It's over in an instant, but George is sure. George is sure that the king of Elytron just *smiled* at a funeral. George is sure that the king of Elytron just taunted him.

George swears to Katerina, swears as her coffin is lowered into the earth in the family crypt. Swears that his bloodied hands will be washed clean. George swears that he will kill her father, no matter what the cost. Because George's life is no longer his. George's life belongs to his country. To his daughter. To the wife he all but killed.

Haltingly, nervously, George prays with Karl and Albert, with his daughter nestled in his arms. The eyes of the world turn towards him as he recites:

*De profundis clamavi ad te, Domine;*

*Domine, exaudi vocem meam.*

*Fiant aures tuæ intendentés in vocem deprecationis meæ.*

*Si iniquitates observaveris, Domine, Domine, quis sustinebit?*

*Quia apud te propitiatio est; et propter legem tuam sustinui te, Domine.*

*Sustinuit anima mea in verbo ejus: Speravit anima mea in Domino.*

*A custodia matutina usque ad noctem, speret Israël in Domino.*

*Quia apud Dominum misericordia, et copiosa apud eum redemptio.*

*Et ipse redimet Israël ex omnibus iniquitatibus ejus.*

Quiet sobs fill the crypt. Nathalie's knuckles turn white around the bouquet of roses as she lets silent wisps of silver stream down her cheeks, dropping onto the floor with quiet finality. Dream leaves a small cluster of daisies beside Katerina's headstone, whispering something indiscernible to Will as he exits with reddened eyes.

George wanders up to Dream's tower after it's all over, dragging his feet, ignoring the pit in his stomach, the weight on his heart. He opens the door gently, waiting in the doorway like a child. Dream looks at him with a hardened expression.

"What is it?" he spits.

George takes a hesitant step backwards. "Nothing," he says hoarsely. "I- I just."

"I don't have time to coddle you, your highness. We leave in a fortnight. I'm fucking busy."

"Right," George says, swallowing roughly. "Right."

"I don't want to do this anymore," Dream grumbles, sitting down at his desk. "I *cannot* do this with you anymore."

George stumbles farther back. Stumbles into the darkness and *runs*.

The heavens don't grant him sleep that night. Rather, they condemn him to wander, wander among the apple orchards and great trees, wander until dawn breaks and he must return to duty, to God, to glory, to country.

## Chapter End Notes

hope that was alright. i miss katerina already.

songs are blood of eden by peter gabriel, mad woman by taylor swift, and tolerate it by taylor swift.

thank you to the coven and nico for reading this over.

[this](#) is what katerina died of

[astra](#)

[playlist](#)

love from the loglady <3



# Learning to Fly

## Chapter Summary

tw for blood, extreme violence, mentions of sexual content and death

## Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for [notes](#)

Grass prickles at his skin. George flexes his fingers, letting each blade gently pierce him. His hands find the earth. It's cool and unnaturally tall and soaked in morning dew. The wetness dampens the back of his shirt, tickles his nape. Flowers are blooming—soft lilac stains the hills, saints of the countryside nestled in endless, rolling green. It's an unnatural life breathed back into a dying kingdom. His eyes don't open. Not yet. The river rushes, tumbling stones smooth, smooth, smoother. Apple trees shake to life, fracturing the sunlight. George silently digs his fingers into the earth, feels dirt wedge itself in the small space between his skin and nails. He digs deeper, hitting small pebbles and flimsy roots. And when he's satisfied with his destruction, the few matted, torn clumps of grass, the bits of overturned mud, George opens his eyes to a troupeau bleu. A herd of blue.

There's not a singular cloud in the sky, and George thinks about Katerina, thinks about how God stole her away during the seasons crafted in her image. The blooms are spun from the color her cheeks flushed when she laughed. The birds sing with the same quiet lilt her voice had. George curses God for leaving her to freeze in the winter, but never thaw and bloom and bloom in the spring. And it's entirely unfair. It's entirely reckless of the universe. A sick fucking joke, and George doesn't know if the bloodred stain on his hands will ever wash away.

A fortnight passes in a blur, and as the carriages approach, the legion of horses and men, the earthmovers and destroyers—George raises himself from the earth to the heavens, becomes a king again, handpicked by God.

George is dutiful—he cares for his child the best he can. George is strong—he banishes the tears before they fall. George is devoted—he goes to his brother's grave, his mother's grave, even his father's grave. Begs for salvation. He goes to Katerina's grave. Begs for forgiveness.

In the hours and minutes and seconds before their band of brothers departs, descends, George makes his way to the abbey, kneels before God the way his grandfather did. *You are my war club, my weapon for battle—*

The door groans open. And George knows those footfalls. He doesn't spare a backwards glance, and shudders when Dream's knee hits the floor beside him.

The mask is discarded. They close their eyes.

*with you I shatter nations, with you I destroy kingdoms.*

Time ticks.

George rises, exiting the abbey with Dream in tow. Dream walks a beat behind him, pulling the

mask back on, silently falling into a role he knows like the back of his heart.

Dream's king adjusts his cloak and approaches the party. George's horse stands next to Dream's, and he mounts it, turning to face his men. Dream follows suit. Something horrific pools in the pit of George's stomach, something twists his veins into a knot. Dream remains fixated on him as he speaks, and George's vision swims with swirls of deepest green.

"Men!" he hollers, feeling his heart tremble. It was never supposed to be him. "We set out to regain our birthright, regain what was bestowed upon Saudade by the heavens. We set out to capture a land owned by men weaker than us. Failure and defeat are a fate worse than death—surrender *guarantees* purgatory. We are twenty-thousand hearts strong, but have the strength of millions. *To the breach, dear friends!*"

Everyone's silent. Will's eyes widen. And then a cheer so loud breaks out, George feels it vibrate in his bones, spread through every cell of his body. He knows, he knows. George knows that through continuous bloodshed and endless death, he's come to command a respect strong as the mightiest river.

And throughout Saudade, through rolling hills stained lilac, through rushing streams and gentle blades of grass, through taverns and schools and villages and the houses of lords and peasants alike,

an east wind blows.

—

The hours after Katerina's funeral were a tempestuous haze, consisting of Astreaea being passed from distant relative to distant relative. Consisting of Albert accepting condolences on George's behalf. Consisting of Karl turning to Nick with chilling ice freezing his watery eyes, turning to Nicholas with a look that says *blood is thicker than water*.

Albert left that night, shaking George's hand with a look of scorn in his eye, a look George had seen in his own fathers' eyes too often. *You failed, Georgie!* Left with his crown prince and his biting words and his evil stare. Left without saying goodbye, leaving Nick a wandering ghost. Because that's what the castle is now, a collection of wandering ghosts. Wandering ghosts preparing for war, preparing to create more ghosts.

The stacks of twinkling gold coins, nestled deep within the bones of the castle have blood spattered on them. Albert's money. Money that solidified a union of falsity, a union of destruction. Money that buys bloodshed, buys hollow promises of glory. And George can't help but feel like the first at a long line of dominoes. Can't help but feel like a soul-snatcher.

Can't help but think, *when is it my time?*

A singular line from the eulogy twists itself into bundles of George's neurons, cadences flowing through his aching veins. *Our Queen's soul shall be bound in the bundle of life, and God will carry her home.* When George meets Will's eyes, he can't help but shudder at the number of funerals they've shared, how each one was frighteningly similar. George can't help but shudder at how many more they'll share.

He seeks clarity. Clarity and truth. He seeks the sun, seeks light.

He seeks Dream, again, marches into his quarters after an eternal fortnight and demands answers, demands an explanation. Spits his soul out onto the flagstone and watches it shrivel into a crisp.

“Yes?” Dream mutters, barely looking up from the maps strewn across his desk. His fingers drum against the cracked wood, thumping like a heartbeat. The gold band sits next to his inkpot, and George can see a small, white tan line on Dream’s finger. Remnants of a false, foolish promise.

George swallows, clenching his fist. The words escape him of their own volition, spilling out of his heart and through his lips. “I refuse to be cast away again. I don’t want to fight mindless battles any longer. You- you *know* me. You know my soul. I’ve given you my whole being. And you’ve *discarded* me, time and time again.”

Dream lets his hand fall on the desk harshly, pushing the papers away like a petulant child. “Your highness,” he says dangerously. “I implore you to use that mind of yours to show some- some fucking *regard* for those other than yourself. Do you think I want to exist in the shadows? Only called forth when you seek castigation? Do you think I can *stand* this existence?” He rises from his seat, flexing scarred fingers.

“You’re fucking kidding yourself if you think the wisps you’ve given me are your whole being. The world is divided in two—there are those who have felt pain, and those who have yet to. We- we have *felt* pain. We have held pain in our hearts for so long, we’ve started to seek more, to seek punishment. And somehow, along the way, you and I have come to believe that only the other is punishment enough. I believe that, George, I believe only you will be punishment enough—you’re- you’re a fucking *scourge* to me. Surviving by your side is torture. Only you will whip scars into my back... But I have a duty to myself to make the scars stop burning.”

George shudders.

“I- I am-” Dream continues, voice shaking with anger, “*consumed* by you. I feel like an open wound when I’m around you, I feel like a void. You’re engraved into me, you’re in my marrow. But your wife is dead. *Your wife is dead*. You have a child and your wife is dead. Do you understand me, George? We sinned, and now a woman is dead. But- but I think that’s what you do. I think that’s what you do to people.”

George takes in a breath. Holds it. “What do I do, Dream?” he spits, lungs burning. “What do I do?”

“You *kill* people,” Dream hisses, “and I’ll die for your country, but I won’t die by your hand.”

He speaks like a golden knife dipped in venom, and George can’t help but ache for the poison to seep through his veins, turn his blood into ice and swallow him whole. Dream spits fire and ichor, and George dutifully holds it in his heart like lifeblood. Keeps it safe for later.

His chest tightens.

“I’ll see you tomorrow,” George says curtly, letting his eyes wander one last time. Giving Dream a look that’s far more than just a goodbye. Far more than just an apology. George’s chest decompresses, life is forced back into his lungs as he walks out the door. And George knows, he knows. He knows that tomorrow, they will face each other as equals, not lovers, not enemies. He knows that no shame nor fear of discovery nor desire to torture has pulled Dream into this armistice—an innocent body has fallen, and in his heart of hearts, George knows they have finally, painfully begun to pay the price for this love of attrition.

—

The journey to Elytron is perilous by horse, tortuous on foot. They twist through valleys of desolation and forests of light. The cavalry forge ahead, lead by Nicholas and Dream, clearing the

path, while the infantry march behind dutifully. Even Nathalie follows on horse, after weeks insisting that she would be useful to the band of healers and doctors accompanying the army. George notices Will's eyes nervously seeking her out every so often, and his stomach twists with something indescribable. By nightfall, they are spent, grunts of exhaustion echoing throughout the party. Generals command their men to stop, to set up camp. The individual armies spread out discreetly through the forest, close enough to see each others' firelight, far enough for the woodland songs to drown out their voices. George retreats into his tent with Will in tow, and they sit in silence, passing a flask back-and-forth, back-and-forth. The candlelight burns dim, and George's skin is bathed orange.

"We never spoke," Will blurts suddenly, taking a swig. "After the funeral. Too busy with—everything."

"What is there to speak about?" George mumbles.

Will looks defeated. "I- are you still seeing Dream?"

"No," George replies curtly. "He- he thought it was best that we ended- our-,"

Will nods vigorously. "I'm sorry."

George shakes his head, laughing hollowly. "No, it's alright. He's right."

"Right. Yes," Will says softly. "He ended it?"

"Yes," George says, the admission burning his tongue.

"Have you spoken?"

George takes in a shuddering breath. "I sought him out, after. Asked him why. He told me- told me that I kill people. That I'm the commonality amongst all this destruction."

He feels it in the silence. The wordless confirmation.

"George-," Will starts.

"Please don't try to convince me. Don't try to say that I'm a good king. Don't try to tell me I'm a good person. He- I am a *scourge*," George snaps, threading his hands through his hair.

"Stop," Will insists. "Please. An- an inordinate number of horrible things have happened to you. I won't deny that. But you are not a scourge. You are not the source of all this confrontation, all this suffering. Dream—he is too much. He is too much for you. You cannot control him, you cannot control his emotions. He can barely control himself. You are bigger than this, George—you are a king and a father. And now- now that she's dead? He must become background noise. He must be just another knight, nothing more. I do not hate you for who you love, I hate you because you are *destroying* yourself to love him."

The air is alive, alight. They hold an amber gaze long enough for George's heart to flip itself inside out, for the rushing in his ears to quiet.

"I don't love him," George whispers.

"He loves you," Will replies, standing. "He loves you. But you must stamp it out like a fire. I'm going to find Nathalie. Goodnight, George."

He escapes through the front opening, leaving George staring into the lamplight, pretending tears aren't working their way down his sunken cheeks.

Sleep is a luxury of the past. He tosses among too-squishy pillows and misses Dream's hard mattress, even breaths, silent protection. George escapes into the light in the early hours of the morning, wandering into a cluster of trees by the camp. It's secluded enough. He stretches his limbs, letting sunlight hit every tendon and ligament that ties his body together. Grass flattens underfoot, sliding against the damp earth. George runs his hands up the bark of an old tree, allowing splinters to freckle his rough palms. There are insects singing and birds flapping golden wings and the rush of a river not unlike the one that wakes him every morning. Not unlike the one that stole his brother away. Maybe the two rivers connect, maybe James' blood has washed deep downstream to water the trees of Elytron, to wash up on banks of the lushest green, amongst a smattering of mossy rocks. George sits, back against a tree, and dips the toes of his boots into the river, letting glimmering water run over beaten leather.

All peace is tenuous, though. Nature is forever disturbed by man. The leaves rustle. The earth shakes. The sunlight fractures into more sunlight. And then there is Dream, Dream, Dream.

George meets his gaze.

"What are you doing?" Dream whispers impassively.

"Nothing," George replies. "Sitting."

"We're- I'm meeting with the generals in a bit. You should join us."

George nods.

Dream turns away, turning his heel in the muck. He takes a step, then turns again, temperamental green twisting beneath his surface. "You're pathetic," he says simply. His words are fire, daring George to fight.

*Stamp it out.*

"Excuse me?" George says tiredly.

"You're- hiding! Sitting here moping like a child. Get the fuck up- go- go lead your army, George!"

George's eyes freeze over. He rises from the earth, dusting off his hands.

"Okay," he spits, stalking over to Dream. "I'll *get the fuck up*."

*Stamp it out.*

"Do you think my world revolves around you?" George spits. *Yes*. "Do you think you're the only thing inhabiting my mind? Do you think that now- now that you and I are finished, I won't be able to rule?" *Yes. Yes yes yes.*

"Actually, yes," Dream sneers. His eyes flash with a cruelty that George had long forgotten. "Every good decision you made as king was because of me. For me. For my approval, so I'd keep breaking you. Do you understand? You're not a king. I've told you this already, but you can't seem to grasp it. You started this war because of me. You got that loan because of me. All of these victories are *mine*. And they'll fucking continue to be mine."

George's breath catches, stutters in his throat. "You're obsessed with yourself. Fucking *delusional*. This is mine. *This. Is. Mine.*" His voice is dangerously low, trembling like it might explode, not shatter. A strange heat collects in his gut, striking to life and churning uncontrollably.

An ugly laugh tumbles from Dream's lips. All scorn and none of the respect George thought grew around them like delicate ivy. "Are you seriously claiming you weren't thinking about me just now?"

"Not at all," George tries to say arily. It comes out acrid, caustic—burning gaping holes in the chambers of Dream's heart. But George's body betrays his mind, and Dream notices his shallow breathing, his flushed cheeks. Dream notices the tightness in his pants and the way his eyes roam.

"You're dirty," Dream sneers, stalking closer. "Filthy."

George flushes, feeling cool sweat settle onto heated flesh. Dream's boots shuffle against the undergrowth, and the king backs up, letting his knight chase him until he's pinned against a tree—warm breath over frigid skin, glittering gold pressed up against thudding veins.

They're an inch apart and George can see his chest rise and fall. He can feel Dream's exhale on his cheeks and smell the whiskey and almost *taste* the mint.

"Filthy little king," Dream spits. "Little *whore*. You chase me like those barmaids in the village. You're a *king*, you're a *commander*, but all you fucking think about is me buried inside you."

*Stamp it out.*

George stamps it out. Wills his heart to stop pounding, wills the heat to leave him. Lets the river flow through his veins. Rainwater and saltwater mixes with his blood, breathes a new life into him. A life where he is truly handpicked by the heavens, an extension of God himself. And Dream? Dream is his *inferior*.

*Dream is nothing.*

"You're entirely consumed by this," George says, and then words begin to spill out uncontrollably, entirely of their own volition. It's like a disease, it's like his insides have turned ash. And now George is a mirror, spitting out the burnt shards of his past self, spitting the poison right back into Dream. "You're obsessed. You- you act so morally superior, so *above* it all. You act like Katerina's death meant something to you. You're nothing. You're *nothing*. You think I can't live without you? I've lived without people my whole life. I've been alone. Fucking alone. But ask yourself, Dream, ask yourself if you're able to live without me."

Dream's hands find George's neck. But he can't stop. He can't stop. "You seek me out no matter where I am. You find me. You always find me. You get off on it, don't you? The constant back-and-forth. You like it when I chase you, like it when I beg. I thought you were done— where's all that now? Because we're back here again, we're back here and your hands are around my neck. And soon they're going to be on me and inside me and your hands will be everywhere. I can control myself—it's you who's unrestrained. And I'm fucking *done* begging for you."

"Watch it, your highness," Dream growls, pressing down harder. George's heart leaps for a moment, because this isn't a look of lust. This isn't the look he remembers. Dream is *angry*. Dream is *furious*. This is pure, unadulterated hate—and George has no time to decipher who the hatred is for.

He forges on.

“Just admit it,” George spits, letting out a wheezing laugh. “Say you love me. Say you love me.”

“*Fuck you!*” Dream practically roars, slamming George’s head into the tree. Stars swim in his vision, stars and then *Dream*.

“Say you love me,” George insists. And he knows this is destruction, he knows this is mutilation. He knows what comes next. Because Dream is Dream. He hasn’t changed. He’ll never change. “You’re in love with me, aren’t you? *You love me,*” George yells, not sure who he’s convincing. “*Say you fucking love me!*”

George smiles as he’s beaten, flashes bloodied teeth after every blow. Because it makes sense. It finally, blissfully makes sense. *I love you*, he thinks, as the life is drained from him. *I love you*, he thinks, as pain blisters through his body, splits him open like a guillotine. Dream’s hands—the hands that always worked him open gently, that always fit into the curve of his hipbone like a key in a lock—are relentless. Punching and slamming over and over again, until George feels something deep inside him shatter—his bones, his heart—he can’t tell. The leaves blur red, the water shimmers red, everything is red red red red *red*. Dream hits his stomach until George spits blood, shatters his hand on George’s jawbone, causing them to both cry out in pain.

And then, Dream holds him. Holds him like he’s going to die.

“You want to hear it so badly? Want me to say it?” Dream growls, tears pooling in his eyes. He thanks God for the porcelain covering his features. “Want to hear it, George? *Pay attention!*” he commands, wrenching George’s face up to meet his.

His head lolls back, and Dream presses them together so George’s blood stains his hands deep mulberry. “I love you,” he whispers desperately, digging his nails into George’s arms. “*I fucking love you.*”

He steps back, and George collapses.

And Dream rips the mask off, turning it over in his hands. Rips the mask off and grips it tightly, silver scars against golden skin, golden ring against crimson fingers. Rips the mask off and stares at the dark river of blood, tributaries running through invisible cracks in the placid white. Rips the mask off and stumbles towards George’s lifeless form. Rips the mask off and drags his fingers through the blood of his life, his love, his sin and his salvation.

It’s almost as if George is asleep. The garden’s—no—*Dream’s* forbidden fruit nestled amongst red-spattered leaves. Long limbs and frozen skin tangled in the vines, in the sweet grass, in the flowers. He barely looks out of place.

George’s nerves are screaming. His cells are ablaze.

A million knives are relentlessly twisted into him, and it’s so all-consuming, George can’t even move. Can’t even cry for help. The hands that hate and love and scar and worship beat him into the earth. He wants to feel furious, wants to fight back. But Dream is in his bones, carved into his marrow with a huntsman’s knife. And George refuses to heal. Refuses to let the wounds close up. Because if this is how Dream will love him, it is enough. He closes his eyes. It is enough.

It is enough.

hi :)

hope this chapter was alright! shit's going down!

troupeau bleu actually means "blue herd" and it's an album by cotex.

"to the breach, dear friends" was a speech made by henry in shakespeare's henry v.  
to give you some context of where they are, saudade is approximately present day  
scotland + the rest of england. elytron is present-day wales.

songs for this chapter are learning to fly by pink floyd and cornfield chase by hans  
zimmer

cry your eyes out to the [playlist](#)

this chapter is for kirk. i love you lots.

loads and loads of love from the loglady <3



# Love/Paranoia

## Chapter Summary

tw for blood/violence

## Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for [notes](#)

George is ablaze.

Blood drips from his nose, down his cheeks and into the grass. Crimson tears. And it hurts. God, it hurts. It hurts. Gnawing and stabbing all at once, shooting through broken limbs and curling up his spine. He feels afloat. The Earth is gone and it's just him, flying, flying, flying and on fire. Burned alive. Too close to the sun.

George wonders if this is how James felt, felt pain and darkness as the river enveloped him, or if his head mercifully hit a rock, if he was put out of his misery long before the water washed through his lungs. George wonders if this is dying, wonders if death is a staircase, long and painful, wonders if he must climb down, claw his way into hell.

But there is no welcoming descent into the inferno, no headfirst leap into the darkness. There is a voice, clear as day, sun-scarred and desperate. Not a divine voice, no God to witness his final breath, no ancestors to guide the king into his next life. It is a voice as human and wretched as George himself. It is a voice that lives deep in his marrow.

It is a voice he will remember in this life and the next. In this universe and every other.

*“George!”*

*“It’s not your time, George!”* Dream is heaving. Screaming. Crying without realizing it. *“Please!”*

Dream’s tears are on his face, mixing with the blood. Red rivers run pink.

*“I’m sorry! I’m sorry! George- George-”*

George’s eyes fly open, blood pools in his mouth. He takes a deep breath, lungs straining.

“Don’t apologize,” he wheezes, spitting blood everywhere. “Don’t you fucking apologize to me. We don’t apologize. I forgive you. I’ve forgiven you for things you haven’t even done yet. I-fuck-”

George remains afloat for a few moments. He coughs, sputters, gasps for air, for life. Gasps while Dream looks down in horror, looks down at his creation. Dream’s never felt so bare—he knows he should feel sick and dirty, a crime, a disease. But he’s finally clean. Their eyes meet. Knuckled under pain, they’re finally clean.

—

Dream didn’t realize how beautiful brown eyes were until they stared back at him in the throne

room, a thousand torches painted in their depths. Dream didn't realize how much he needed to have those eyes reflecting his, watching and aching in silence. George is all sharp bones and cheeky grins, sloppy kisses and gentle light. George has a perpetually sunburnt nose and his eyes crinkle when he smiles. He sighs softly when he's asleep, louder when he's awake. He rarely laughs, but he laughs like fire, spreading through cobbled streets and melting even the most stubborn frost. George loves the snow but hates the cold, he holds Dream's hand in his sleep, shoves his freezing feet against Dream's legs to warm them. He's written notes in the margins of every book he's read. He expects Dream to write back. He's all the light in the world, bottled up into that glorious smile, but he's also destruction, because nobody makes Dream's chest shatter in such horrifying ways. But this is love. This is love. Love *is* destruction. Love cuts you deep, but love can also gently lace itself through your spine and live within your chest. Maddeningly. Achingly. Beautifully.

Dream knows that everyone before, everyone else, everyone is *nothing* compared to brown eyes and scruffy hair. Compared to those days in the orchards, arguing about nothing and pretending their fingers aren't seeking each other's warmth. Compared to those nights illuminated by moonbeams, soft and secret and *theirs*. Compared to George.

The regret shoots through his stomach like a sickness. Dream relives every punch, every strike, feeling his heart curl in upon itself. He can't get George's bloody smile out of his mind. He can't banish the shame from his chest. Because maybe George wanted this, maybe he needed this, maybe he even deserved this. Maybe he deserved retribution for all the death and all the whipping and all the scars and blood and destruction. All the failures. Maybe Dream wanted his king to feel all the pain. Because in their own, sick way, Dream and George are reborn under the canopied sky. With a pit of something indiscernible in his heart, Dream closes his eyes and prepares for the fallout. Welcomes it. In fact, maybe they'll be merciful and execute him then and there, no questions asked. Dream kisses George's forehead, letting his lips stain red, understanding that if he dies, he'll die with this love coursing through his bloodstream. He'll die clean.

—

Nathalie finds them first, huddled together like a single being. Her eyes narrow, then widen, then narrow again.

And then she starts screaming. Screaming for Will.

She grabs Dream savagely, uses every ounce of strength to heave him off George. She pushes him to the ground with acid clouding her eyes. "*Can you hear me?*" she yells. "*George?*"

George blinks, eyes darting from side to side in a desperate attempt to locate Dream.

"*Will!*" Nathalie screams over her shoulder, cupping George's face. "Where's the fucking bleeding coming from?" she says frantically, ripping strips of fabric from her skirts. George feels gentle fingers prod his nose, feels the fabric stuffed into his mouth. "Sorry," she whispers, then slams her fingers down on the bridge of his nose, snapping the bones back into place. The pain blinds George momentarily, shooting up into his forehead and into the back of his skull.

She tips water from a canteen onto the cloths, wiping the blood from his face. "Can you breathe?" she asks quietly. He nods again. She pulls the fabric out of his mouth. "Can you move?" she asks. George flexes his fingers against the matted grass, feeling dew seep into his skin. He jerks his head to the side.

Nathalie looks over at Dream, hovering helplessly. "I can- I can find Will," he musters.

"You don't move. Do not move," she spits. "Haven't you done enough?"

She looks down at George again. "I can't move you alone. I have to get someone," she says apologetically. "But I can't- I don't want to leave you with him," she says, lowering her voice to a hoarse whisper.

George squeezes his eyes shut.

"Nick," Dream says. "I'll get- let me get him."

One heartbeat, two.

"Go," she says roughly. "Don't even think about running."

"I'm not-" Dream spits. "I won't," he sighs, softening.

They return after a short eternity, and Nick falls to his knees next to George. "Is he alive?" he asks Nathalie gruffly. Dream goes pale as Nick puts an ear to George's chest.

"Barely," she grits out. "Can we move him to my tent without alerting the rest?"

Nick nods. "Where's Will?"

"I thought he would come with you," Nathalie says.

The world spins as Nick slings George's arm around his shoulder. "Watch his neck," Nathalie rushes. "I don't think he can walk."

"Let me carry him," Dream pleads. "Please, let me."

"Nicholas, pick him up," Nathalie says.

"*Please* let me take him, Nathalie," Dream insists. "I didn't know-"

"You didn't know what? You didn't know that when you beat him that he would bleed?" She marches up to Dream. "You-" Nathalie says quietly, dangerously, "are a *poison*. Do you understand? You stay away from him, or I swear to God, I'll kill you myself." She wipes away a tear before it has the chance to fall. "I blamed him, you know. I blamed him for my friend dying. But it- it's *you*. Not him. The blood spilled since you've plagued us with your presence makes me sick. You make me sick. So no, no to you, no to your help. *Get the hell away from him.*"

Nick's lips part. "You did this?" he asks, eyes darkening. "I thought- you told me you needed help- you said he was attacked-" he stutters. "*You* attacked him?"

Dream is quiet, avoidant, dangerous. His eyes roam, flickering with fire, searching for an unmarred portion of the forest floor.

"Move him," Nathalie commands. "Now."

They move in silent procession to the tent, huddled together with Dream in tow. The forest stirs as they slip behind the rest of the generals' tents. George feels a sharp pain in his side when Nick lowers him onto the floor. He sucks in a breath and meets Nathalie's eyes.

"I'm going to cut your shirt off," Nathalie murmurs. Nick wordlessly hands her a knife and George twists his head to look at Dream. The cool side of the blade slides against George's skin as Nathalie works the shirt off his shoulders.

"Dream," he whispers.

Nathalie's eyes grow wide.

Dream gazes down at him with some undecipherable desperation twisting his features.

They let out a collective gasp as the last of George's shirt falls away, and Dream takes a step forward, then backward, then collapses onto his knees. George looks down, stretching his sore neck, looks down at a mix of purples and reds painted across his stomach and chest. He sees a small indent in the side of his chest—Nathalie runs her fingers over his bare skin and proclaims it a broken rib. George's gut twinges as he lies there, eyes heavenward, a rough blanket shielding his scraped back from the earth. Every cell in his body feels *Dream*, violently turning shades of supermassive galaxies and nebulae, star clusters sounding the alarm.

God has never been merciful. This is torture. This is divine, calculated, predestined, deserved punishment. He coughs, and the room stills. He coughs red, hot, painful blood. Nathalie lifts his head up, wiping it all away. But Dream, Dream. Dream looks at George with cautious curiosity. It's inexplicable. Indecipherable.

"We need to be discreet," Nathalie says over her shoulder. "Go find Will, I'll take care of this."

"But Dream—"

"I fucking know," Nathalie spits. "Just go."

Nick nods sharply, then wordlessly slips out of the tent. It's silent except for the popping of a lantern, and Dream kneels at George's feet, a hardened expression settling over his features.

An hour passes, two, three. Nathalie applies various creams and herbs to George's skin, muttering a quiet *sorry* every time George winces or coughs. She bandages his wounds and sets his bones. At some point, the blood stops, but the taste lives in his mouth like a rusty nail, deteriorating on his tongue. Nathalie washes the matted blood from his hair, allowing him swigs of wine to keep the pain at bay. At some point, Dream begins playing with the laces of George's boot, and George can't help but feel a rush of blood to his head. To his heart. George's chest swells as the laces twist between Dream's fingers, as he tugs and pulls and fidgets. But Nathalie gives Dream a look that stuns him into submission.

Dream backs off despite himself, feeling like an unwelcome passenger in his own body. He looks down at his hands, noticing George's dried blood wedged under his fingernails. He takes stock of his bruised knuckles, his scarred palms. Their colors match, he thinks. The supernova of color splayed across George's body finds a home, an origin in Dream's hands. And it would be beautiful if it wasn't so nauseating to see George spread out like that, fluttering in and out of consciousness, offering barely-reassuring grins with blood-stained teeth.

Nick returns after a lifetime, Will in tow. And Nathalie senses him before she sees him, turning to meet her lover's eyes. She cocks her head to the side, studying his face. "He's fine for now," she says curtly. "Where did you go?"

"I was—" Will stammers. "Later."

He stalks past Dream, kneeling next to George's head. "Fuck," Will says, pressing a hand to George's hair, eyes darting madly. "Nick didn't say who—" Will turns to Dream. "Who did this?"

"I was attacked," George says, much too loudly. Dream runs a hand through his hair, gripping it hard. "Spies from Elytron, possibly. A group of them. Dream saved me. He saved me."

"George—" Will murmurs, wanting to believe. He looks at Nathalie, who shakes her head.

“He saved me,” George insists, closing his eyes. For a few moments, he can’t hear anything but the gentle crackle of fire, boots shuffling around. A quiet sob, fraught and true. A pained sigh, familial and broken.

He hears Nathalie murmur to Nick, and a grunt of agreement. “We need to put him out,” she whispers to Will. “He *must* rest.”

It’s loud enough to reach George’s ears, and his eyes fly open, finding Dream’s in a panic. Dream’s eyes are bloodshot, tears pooling in the corners. Taunting him, threatening to spill. Tenuous and delicate but violent and defiant all at once.

“No,” George spits, shaking his head. “No, don’t- you can’t. I’m alright.”

Nathalie rushes over, tipping the contents of a bottle onto a rag.

“Don’t!” George says, louder.

Will nods at Nathalie.

“*No!*” George yells, pounding his arms against the floor. He tries to raise himself up but something dark mercilessly drives itself into his chest. And George can’t do anything but scream himself hoarse. The sound itself *hurts*, rage mixed with guilt and a twinge of absolute hopelessness. “Don’t touch Dream, Will. Do you hear me? Don’t touch him. *Please!*”

He thrashes against nothing. George sees Will in the periphery of his tear-streaked vision and tries to wordlessly plead. Beg. Cower.

“Grab his arms, Will,” Nathalie says.

“What?” Will says, whipping around wildly. “I’m not touching him!” And George sees it. George curses it. Will is *scared* of him.

“Grab his arms! He’s only going to injure himself further. Hold him down!”

Nick begins to stalk forward, a determined expression on his face.

But it’s Dream. Dream, who wrenches George’s arms into the Earth. Dream, who holds his gaze as Nathalie shoves the rag into his mouth. Dream, whose tears fall onto George’s face for the second time that day. The salt stings the scrape on his cheekbone.

“You’re hurting me,” George mumbles through the cloth, resigned.

“I know,” Dream whispers, rubbing his thumb against George’s freezing skin.

The world spins, and clouds, and disappears altogether.

Nathalie collapses into Will’s arms. They grip each other, nails driving into raw flesh, stepping away from George slowly, as though he may explode at any moment.

“He’s stable,” Nathalie says. George draws in a rattling breath.

Will is the first to surface, viciously grabbing Dream and wrenching him away from George. He reaches down and produces a dagger from his belt, holding the blade to Dream’s neck.

“You get one night,” Will says sharply, breathing in shallow gasps.

“Will-” Nathalie begins to protest.

“Get out,” Will spits, his words turning to ice. “Nick, take her away. Both of you, get out. *Now!*”

Nathalie shivers. Rough fingers close around her arm.

Will watches them leave, sliding the blade back and forth against Dream’s neck.

“Listen to me,” he hisses. “Listen. You stay with him tonight, and tomorrow morning I drag you in front of the generals. They’ll decide what to do with you. I don’t care what he says. I don’t care what protection he may extend. I won’t allow it. Your fate will be decided tomorrow at daybreak. Do you understand? You get *one night*.”

Dream nods. The tip of the blade pierces him. It’s a welcome sting.

“I’m sorry,” Dream growls. “I needed to do it- I- I wanted to do it but I didn’t mean-”

“I fought for you,” Will says furiously. “I always fought for you. I never- I never discouraged him. But I can’t fight for this. You’re- you’re *sick*, Dream. If he had died... I would have killed you—right here with my bare hands. That’s a fucking promise.”

The side of Will’s lip quirks. Dream swallows roughly, blood rushing into his ears. Pounding, pounding.

“I’m posting guards outside the tent, although if I were you, I wouldn’t run. We torture the runners before killing them.” Will spits, poison dripping from his words, seeping throughout the room. Clouds of it. Dream’s throat tightens. His hands fly to his dagger, gripping the hilt like a vice, because Dream would be lying if he said he didn’t miss the feeling of blood flowing through his hands—reluctantly dripping from his fingertips, as if it couldn’t get enough of him.

George’s scraping breaths wake him up, shut him down. He freezes in his defiance. As Will exits, Dream sees a flash of the sun setting through the trees, casting freckled rays on the forest floor. He lays down next to George. Touches his ear, his eyebrow, runs a fingertip against his eyelashes, his lips. Dream twists a lock of George’s hair between his fingers. Dream works his way down until his palm is flat against George’s chest. His ribs. His heart. Beating steady, as always.

“I love you,” Dream whispers.

The lanterns project misshapen shadows on the walls, dancing beside them.

“I love you, George,” Dream whispers again. “Almost desperately so. I used to believe in saving bits of myself, harboring away everything so I never had to surrender to another. But how can I? How can I refuse surrender when you... you *exist* within me so maddeningly. Your love is unafraid. Nobody—nobody has ever been unafraid but you.”

George twitches in his sleep. Their heartbeats find a rhythm.

“I breathe for you,” Dream continues, words tumbling out on their own volition. “I’m covered in you. You’re in my heart. You’re everywhere. I love you in the strangest, simplest ways. I love everything about you, even the parts I hate. I love you in the ways you can’t see. In the ways I failed to show you. And I’m sorry. I’m sorry I had to beat you half to death to feel something. To feel equal. I’m sorry we’re condemned to silence. I don’t believe in many things, but in some life, somewhere, we’re better. We’re free. And I hope I’m in that life next, George. I hope we’re there together. I’ll love you even when I’m dead. I’ll love you no matter who I am, where I am, even when you forget my name. I will love you despite it all.”

The lanterns die out, one by one.

The forest settles, the sun slips over the horizon.

And throughout it all, Dream loves George.

## Chapter End Notes

“laugh like fire” is from a song called henry by soccer mommy

“knuckled under pain” is from a song called the body is a blade by japanese breakfast

songs are love/paranoia by tame impala and my tears ricochet by taylor swift.

love you all

# Poles Apart

## Chapter Summary

tw for blood/violence/mild gore

## Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for [notes](#)

Night brings more torment than day promises. George has nightmares of James' skull cracking open on the rocks. Then his father's skull, then his mother's. Nightmares of Katerina calling to him from beyond the grave, nightmares of Dream burning Saudade to the ground. Nick dies first, then Will, then Nathalie, calling out George's name. It echoes like she's nestled at the bottom of a well, screaming for him to *act*. To *fight*. Rivers run red, taverns die to fire, forests turn to ash. At Dream's hands. By Dream's will.

And all George does, all George *can* do, is watch in horror as bile rises up in his throat. Before he, too, is silenced. At Dream's hands. By Dream's will.

George jolts awake, flexing each of his fingers. The weight on his chest is unbearable, and after a moment of alarm he realizes—Dream's strewn across him, breathing shallowly, quickly. Studying Dream is an obsession. George traces the thin, silver scars across Dream's face with narrowed eyes. He doesn't know where the scars came from. He doubts Dream will tell him. George wonders if when Dream opens his eyes, they'll be black like the Dream that haunts his nightmares. He wonders if Dream will wake up and finish what he started in the woods. And George's fear is entirely clouded by curiosity. His self-preservation is entirely eclipsed by compulsion.

George's heart beats faster and louder and faster still, until Dream shifts and sighs and bolts upright with a grimace. George's ribs decompress, his lungs fill with air.

The absence stings.

And the pain persists, burning up George's spine and festering in his chest. Moving jerkily, he grabs a fistful of Dream's shirt in his hands, meets green eyes with a defiant stare, and presses their lips together. It's not quite loving, not quite comforting. But Dream's lips are warm. His skin is warm. George squeezes his eyes shut when Dream falters. But George's tongue making its way across Dream's lower lip is simply far too much to bear, because Dream comes alive, moves his rough fingers across George's jawline and down his neck. Dream's nails graze the waistband of George's pants, tracing the soft skin there over and over again, memorizing. Memorizing. They are reduced to skin, to flesh, reduced to dust under each other's touch.

"George," Dream sighs, tumbling, spiraling down to Earth. "Stop."

George draws back with a frown, tugging at Dream's hair impatiently. And it shatters Dream. Annihilates him. Confounds him that George keeps coming back for more. And more, and more again. Deep within him, Dream knows what he must do. What he was meant to do from the start, the second he knew George loved him back.

"Will's coming soon." Dream says curtly.



“No,” George replies, shaking his head, heart pounding. “No,” he repeats louder.

Dream’s features harden, and George feels a surge of desperation, feels a dizzying amount of blood rush to his head.

“I have to go,” Dream grunts. “There’s nothing else to be done.” Convincing himself, convincing George. And he thinks that maybe, maybe this will be good. Maybe this will be the only good Dream ever does, and maybe severing this insurmountable tie will fix everything, solve it all. Because maybe the only way George can live is if Dream dies. Dream thinks he’s okay with that. Dream thinks he deserves that.

For a moment, George seems elsewhere, searching for something indiscernible. Dream feels exposed, open, spread bare for all to see. Because George understands his mind in the strangest, simplest ways. He’s George. He’s George. Contrarian and angry and unwilling to grieve again. Unwilling to lose.

“Nobody’s going to touch you, Dream,” he murmurs.

“George-” Dream pleads with a single word. It comes out angry, biting. Except he’s not angry, he’s tired. Tired and ready.

George claws deep within himself, reaching for the only way Dream will understand. The words seem foreign and feigned coming from his mouth, unnatural and overdramatic, but he spits them out with fire nonetheless. “*I am your king*. I’m planning to spare your life. Let me handle this, or I’ll think again.”

Dream feels a surge of heat in his chest, looking George over with narrowed eyes. Relishing how sick, how beautiful it is that he practically created the body before him—painted all the sickness across George’s skin. Dream feels a twinge of satisfaction when goosebumps spread across George’s arms. He forgets how easy it is to fall back. He forgets how this is second nature to him. George’s heart pounds at the look in Dream’s eye, but he doesn’t falter.

By some grace of God, Will chooses that moment to enter the tent, and Dream climbs to his feet, smoothing out his hair. But George is ice-cold and barren, disregarding Will as though he’s a stranger.

“Dream,” Will says, an ugly look in his eyes. “Let’s go.”

Dream returns the look, but moves to follow nonetheless. He loves to watch George squirm for him, bleed for him. He loves to watch George burn a lifetime of trust for him. He loves to watch George *die* for him. And he knows George loves the same. Condemned to each other, condemned to be apart. This is Dream’s undoing. This is Dream’s understanding.

“He’s not coming with you, Will.” George says, pulling himself to his feet, throwing himself between Dream and Will. It hurts—the defiance in George’s eyes flickers and dims as pain washes over him.

Will makes a pained noise, then turns frantic. “This isn’t your decision anymore. He- he *beat* you, George! You nearly died. You- do you understand? If you die- this is all over, it’s all lost. You have a duty to your kingdom, your people. You have a responsibility to fight this war.”

George breathes in, out. God, it hurts. Dream’s slipping through his fingers, through the cracks in the Earth. Because it’s just him, alone again. Dream’s ready to go, with one foot out the door. There is a fraught, blooming ache in George’s chest screaming to stop this, to throw his broken

bones atop Dream. To mend the unmendable.

“Get out,” he seethes, steadying himself. “Get out, Will. You don’t have any proof, you have nothing. Just Nathalie’s word, and—honestly. Who’s going to fucking believe her? Get the fuck out.”

“I’m coming with you, Will-” Dream says harshly.

“Quiet,” George spits without a backwards glance, stalking towards Will. His legs tremble from walking just a few steps, and Will notices, because he always does.

“George—*stop*.” Will pleads, a crazed look in his eye. And for a moment, just a moment, George drops the facade. His face turns ashen. His heart skips a beat. Will thinks he’s won, stepping closer to George. But just as quickly as their sanity returns, it departs again, whisking away their last shreds of dignity, of humanity. George balls his fists, his eyes swirl into fire and his heart pounds louder as Will’s brow furrows. “I do not care what jurisdiction you may think you have, William. Leave my *private* chambers at once or I will have you escorted out.” His voice comes out even, clear. It shocks Dream. It wounds Will. It’s a single, slow desire fermenting. Destroying.

They’ve never fought like this. It’s never hurt like this. But George keeps going, keeps chipping away at Will, because he’s too far gone. There’s a curse within him that spares nothing to protect Dream. It’s self-indulgent, wretched, caustic. Burning him from the inside out.

Will swallows harshly, eyes narrowing. He grips George’s forearm, nails digging into bruised skin. “We have to fucking reach Elytron, George. We can’t invade without a king, without a leader. You must get there.” Will’s yelling, spit flying out of his mouth as his eyes go wild. “The- the right of the people exists above the right of the king. This isn’t your decision. Dream has to- please- *please*, George,” George grimaces as tears begin to swim in Will’s eyes. But he doesn’t cry. They don’t spill. “I cannot stand back and watch you try to kill yourself any longer. I cannot live-”

George grabs Will by the back of his hair, closes his fist around a mess of curls, wrenching their faces together.

“You’re a pathetic fucking leech, Will,” George spits, his vision clouding. “You think you can quote constitution to me when this is the position I was born and bred for? You’re nothing. *Nothing*. You aren’t taking Dream, or I swear to God, I’ll kill you. Those guards you brought with you? They’re *mine*. They’ll slit your throat and spill your blood at my feet if I ask them to. This is my land, my kingdom, my armies, my war. *Mine*. As your king, Sir Gould, I command you to leave *at once* and alert our generals to pack up camp. We depart in an hour. It’ll do you good to remember that everyone in this room, in this kingdom, is alive because of me. Because of my courtesy.”

“*Get off me!*” Will shoves George to the floor. Pain erupts across George’s skull, turning his vision blood red. Every inch of him is burning, blistering, festering in agony. George looks down at the red crescent moons littered across his forearm.

“Kill him, Dream,” George rasps.

Will and Dream lock eyes. Dream shakes his head. “No.”

“*Kill him!*” George screams.

Ripping open the entrance to the tent, Will glances back at George once more. “You forget something, Your Highness. You weren’t born or bred for this. The crown fell into your lap by

some wretched accident, and you've made a mockery out of the position you inhabit. Fucking *remember that.*"

He disappears with the guards, disappears before George can open his mouth to form a response. Will's cut him to his core. Cut him open, bit by bit. Spilled all his rotted insides out for the world to see. It's the cold stone of the family crypt seeping into his veins, it's the blood-spattered shores of Saudade, it's the blood-soaked bedsheets, and the blood-soaked tablecloth. It's the death and destruction that follows him like a curse, it's the cruel truth that he was never meant to live in this castle, never meant to fight these wars. It's a reminder of mediocrity and a reminder of ruin. A reminder of selfishness in the name of obsession. In the name of wretched masochism.

Dream follows Will, leaving George in the aftermath, in the ashes, to wither away. Dream follows Will without a backwards glance, neglecting his mask on the floor.

George lies there, motionless, drifting in and out of reality. He watches the walls shake and swirl, feels the ground move beneath him, hears his head and heart pound in unison. He's entirely unaware of how much time passes until Dream returns, carrying him back to the mess of pillows. He doesn't stay for long. Nathalie comes in next, changes his bandages with a blank look on her face.

"Do you want to be put out?" she murmurs.

George nods.

She holds the foul-smelling cloth to his face, and the world ceases to exist.

A voice rains from the sky in his dreams.

*Do you know, George? Do you know? I used to press down on the bruises you sucked into my skin to remember you the next day. I thought it would be enough, I thought it would be enough to quit. I couldn't. You didn't let me. You soulless animal, feeding on my meat. I look at you in awe while my bones snap between your teeth. In the beginning, I thought I should hang for what I did to you. But I remembered just how empty you are. I remembered how unfeeling you are. I remembered how you smiled at me as your blood flowed through my fingers. I remember how you laughed at me while I screamed at you to stay awake, to stay alive. I'm scared of you. I'm so fucking scared. But I need you. I love it. I can't live. I can't live like this. I hate you, George. I hate what you've done to me. And I love you so much I feel like I can hardly breathe.*

## Chapter End Notes

hope u like it. i think this one was a little cray bc i was in the dark place while writing it but now i am feeling better so hopefully dnf won't be such freaks in the next chapter. university is kicking my ass rn sorry i never update but i still love silly little king george knight dream and will finish this story someday!

songs are poles apart by pink floyd, une barque sur l'océan by andre leplante, and nowhere near by yo la tengo

special thanks to saint for yelling at me to update and another special thanks to kirk and ffonippop bc they are my besties and another special thanks to mar just because

hope you are all happy and healthy okay bye i need to go memorize 20 amino acids unfortunately.

loglady loves you forever!!!!!!

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